- Women are a low priority

  The fact that in 1996, the UN agencies are still unclear about their position on women speaks very loudly that women have never been considered an important enough concern.

- Women are under-represented in employment

  Significantly low numbers of female staff in UN offices in particular, and noticeably lacking at management level, does not indicate an equal opportunities recruitment policy at international or national level. At the time of the study, 14 expatriate women were involved in programming at professional level, based in Afghanistan and Pakistan, compared with over 70 men.

- Afghanistan recruitment policy appears to be gender blind

  Any policy that exists is unclear, but appears to lack consideration of candidates' attitudes to gender equality, both internationally and nationally.

  Many international male staff either are, or rapidly become, chauvinistic on posting to Afghanistan. This is a widespread observation for which many women make allowances on grounds of peer pressure, but these should not be necessary.

  These concerns may reflect recruitment on criteria more related to potential for battlefield survival.

  If gender insensitive men are allotted the task of representing women's opportunities, then it is unlikely that they will share sufficient commitment to be successful.

- Chauvinism in the work place speaks of its long term tolerance, and that the principles of gender equality have taught little

  Women staff report frequent instances of harassment. These range from insulting and derogatory remarks to national women (these made by national male colleagues) which can escalate to statements of their promiscuity - also commonplace about international women; judgements and assessments of women made on the basis of personality rather than performance; serious sexual harassment (with promises of contracts or jobs), and death threats. These are not issues women feel they can discuss with their bosses, and many are reluctant even to share with female colleagues.

- Facilities such as security, transport, toilets, food and accommodation all reflect lack of recognition of and concern for female colleagues, both as a norm and within a particular cultural context (see chapter 3.4, Key points).

Key points:

- Chauvinistic attitudes and behaviour by men towards women are quite common place, both from international and national men. Some of these are serious in nature.
- The UN itself, being called upon from many quarters to represent the cause the female human rights, sets a particularly poor in-country example.
- A review of its organisational culture is needed to give credibility to the many charters of which it is the author.

5.2.2 Political prejudice

As discussed in chapter 2, all except the northern political authorities around Afghanistan have imposed specific restrictions on women's rights to work, her mobility and freedom of dress. Yet it is the Taliban Movement, on its arrival and impositions in Herat, which has finally drawn attention to the particular plight of women in Afghanistan

Most agencies have complaints of authorities - of obstruction, of malpractices, of inconsistency, of incompetence. These are familiar experiences in virtually all emergency and many development contexts; most people consider them to be an occupational hazard.

What is evident at present is a particular emphasis on the Taliban as the exclusive culprits, and on the part of some individuals of approaching them with preconceived biassed attitudes. If agency representatives commonly describe the Taliban in terms of their inferiority, idiocy, and brutality, they reinforce local tensions, and both explicitly and implicitly proclaim a differential valuation of people. In effect they are contributing to conflict, rather than conflict resolution. While the latter is the specific task of the UN peace mission, such openly expressed attitudes within the UN convey very mixed messages.

Where such people are responsible for making approaches to Taliban offices on sensitive issues such as female opportunities, there is little hope of a positive outcome. Their prejudice is detrimental to female programmes. The fact that individuals have successfully achieved results to problems - female related and otherwise - is an indication that Taliban can listen and understand the concerns of aid agencies. And whatever individuals think and feel, it is vital to keep doors open for dialogue.

While most people recognise the Taliban's ultra-conservative values, they are not necessarily equipped to deal with them. The reality is that we cannot expect the most rigid minded of the Taliban to grasp concepts and values of which many have no knowledge, and no interest. There is a gulf of knowledge and experience which negotiators have selectively and appropriately to fill in. Nor ought we to expect the local head of agency to bridge that gulf. The task is a specialised one requiring a sound knowledge of Afghanistan's various sub-cultures, well developed negotiation skills and more than the average share of human understanding and patience. A key task to be achieved is to find the common ground, for which a sound understanding of Islam and of movements such as the Taliban is needed.

Key points: Political prejudice

- Aid agencies staff cannot afford to allow personal value judgements jeopardise relations with authorities.
- The task of representation on 'issues' such as female opportunities to employment or education, as opposed to regional operational matters, ought not to be in the hands of local agency representatives. Many do not have the specialised skills for the task, potentially place themselves and local colleagues at risk, and some may lose their objectivity due to local stresses of continuing programmes in very difficult circumstances.
- Specific individuals need to undertake major policy representation.

5.2.3 Community prejudice

Rather like political prejudice, community prejudice manifests itself both as verbal and non-verbal behaviours which give strong value-laden messages between 'them' as rural, or poor, beneficiaries and 'us' as aid providers. In some cases this is clearly a two-way prejudice; a father says he does not want his daughters to become like the two young female health and veterinary trainers (covered

from top to toe, without made-up faces) because he objects to an idea he had of Kabuli women, rather than the reality of the two perfectly respectable individuals in front of his eyes.

Ideas of inferiority of beneficiaries, deriving from their 'ignorance' or from 'filth' need to be modified through understanding of causes, such as lack of educational opportunities, and lack of access to water and knowledge about hygiene. Implicit messages of rejection, for whatever reason, are also to be carefully avoided. Ignoring villagers' hands extended in greeting because they are dirty, rejecting cups of tea or fruits once provided due to fears of disease (carry a knife for peeling fruit), rejecting infants offered in cultural faith in universal motherhood, reluctance to adopt floor level sitting because it indicates equal, lowly, status - all create barriers which can be avoided.

Rural or poor women and men may be uneducated, but they are not unintelligent. If anything, because there are inevitably barriers such as city/provincial, urban/rural, professional/illiterate, perceived affluence/perceived poverty, foreign/local - greater effort needs to be made to overcome them and diminish the perceived 'status' differences.

A second level of prejudice manifests itself in the lack of clear understanding of what it means to work **with** people in communities, and **for** people in communities. Essentially it means 'getting to know the community, and for female implementers, most notably its women'. This is as much a matter of personality as it is of competence. The objective is communication - at a level the women can feel comfortable with.

This is an opportunity for the female field worker to demonstrate her skills in understanding her community and her work. Her own appearance, attitude, knowledge, and even age are key points to consider; her presentation can have significant impact on the women's - and men's - acceptance. This can have favourable, or other, impact on how her agency is judged, and how beneficiary communities view all aid agencies. Thus the responsibility is high.

What community field work is not - and clearly a percentage of young women we encountered need guidance on this - is an opportunity to display city fashion, on a trip to the country. Doubtless some of the younger community women will thoroughly enjoy this, but it will distract their attention, and possibly create tensions both for them and the field worker with older women - and ultimately possibly with community men. Agencies need to address this clearly and sensitively; it may be that young female staff have no alternative dress and if they are key family breadwinners, their office clothes are already carefully calculated purchases.

Key points: Community prejudices

- Establishing good rapport with community women is a prerequisite to effectively reaching women to support their development.
- Female field staff have a key role to play. They need to give serious consideration to the verbal and non-verbal messages they convey, on behalf of themselves, their agencies, and as representatives of the wider aid community.
- They need management support to achieve this.

5.3 INADEQUATE CAPACITIES

A major obstacle to female and male staff achieving the best possible for their Afghan sisters is their lack of skills appropriate to the tasks they are expected to undertake. In order to be successful in reducing inequalities between men and women, all staff need to understand what these are, and

how they can go about supporting a process of increasing awareness of women's contributions and interests, and of ultimate change.

Many working women are now functioning in NGO or UN offices without any clear idea about what that means. (Totally empty desks are a good indicator of this - too many seen.) Some do not appear to have management support to help direct them, organise themselves or their work, manage others, communicate effectively, budget, use computers, and so on.

Field staff need to be trained to look more closely at their communities, to understand who does what and when. They also need skills in listening, in facilitating group discussions, encouraging the usually unheard voices to speak out, to build confidence and support women in a process of increasing self awareness and self worth. Training in community development, and participative observation - usually included in modules on Participatory Rural Appraisal or similar - would be useful.

Female and male staff at all levels of agencies need gender training. This needs to be broken down into manageable chunks, covering what it means not only in implementation but also in everyday personal and working life, how it is applied at all stages of the project cycle, and appropriate tools selected, adapted to Afghanistan where necessary, and monitored in use.

Many urban programe staff need training in general and project management, budgeting, leadership, communications.

These trainings needs to be made widely available, reaching beyond UN and NGO offices to include local authority departments who are cooperating partners for some agencies. The emphasis must be on implementing staff, not on Pakistan-based desk officers.

Key points: Inadequate capacities

- Implementation staff have often not received training for new responsibilities - particularly in changes from emergency work to community development. Communications, liaison, gender analysis, participatory methods are all necessary.
- Female staff need support to develop a sound understanding and skills in their management functions.

5.4 A FEMALE RESOURCE UNIT

As discussed in chapter 3.2, the most frequently mentioned weakness in our organisations brought up in regional workshops was the lack of female resources needed to reach and work with women. Together with that problem, specific attention was drawn to the fact that professional and technical expertises were lacking in many areas.

UN agencies in particular suffer from the absence of female resources, which makes the task of those few women in post double hard.

One of the most frequent requests the study team received from female field officers was training resources - thus their ideas of skills upgrading their local field officers were hampered.

One of the most often encountered yawning gaps was information on what happens in other regions and how - information exchange, particularly on opportunities and lessons learned, does not take place.

PART THREE

WAYS FORWARD

One of the greatest criticisms made by staff of the UN position on women was its lack of any central role for women/gender in the UN system.

In the immediate absence of essential female staff, the UN agencies might consider a separate inter-agency all-female unit within the UN to support all agency programme coordination and outreach for a period, until individual agency female capacities are established. This could be achieved as a 'pooling' of available female resources, or short-term contracting or assignments from other UN agency regional offices.

Key points:

- In the immediate absence of necessary female resources within the UN, a short-term solution needs to be found to establishcentral coordination of women's programming. This is required to fulfill current demands for information, for resourcing and disseminating information on the position of women in Afghanistan, for accessing and sharing useful resource materials, and providing linkages between regions.

5.5 SUMMARY: INTERNAL OBSTACLES - barriers we can remove

- There are a number of obstacles within our organisations which prevent effective programming for women; as these are within our control, they can be overcome.
- There is a tendency for agencies to operate independently, when much more could be achieved for women by integrating assistance, and by respecting technical expertise of individual agencies.
- Aid agencies, particularly the United Nations family, need to assess their own prejudicial attitudes and behaviours towards their female staff, towards political parties (notably the Taliban Movement), and towards poor and uneducated beneficiaries.
- Together with the need for more female resources within the UN agencies, is a need for training of existing staff - both women and men - in gender analys, participative observation, community development and a variety of management skills.
- Within the UN family there is need for a central coordinating function for women's programming, to provide specific information to support field needs, to share experience and lessons learned, and to support communications between the regions on gender related issues.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study on current programming for women in Afghanistan are documented in Part Two of the report. Chapter two focuses on the external, socio-political constraints on women's access to assistance, followed by a description and analysis of the different approaches (chapter three) currently adopted by aid agencies to reach out to women. Relevance and effectiveness of current health, educational and income generation projects are reviewed by drawing upon the views of women themselves (chapter four), who identified several key problems. The concluding chapter (five) again returns to consider obstacles to achieving improvements in the lives of women, and focusses on those inside our organisations - those we can change if we have the will. Throughout these chapters, **Key points** are presented at the end of each section, and chapter **Summaries** provided at the end of each chapter. The summaries can be found in section 2.4 on **pp.37-40,** section 3.5 on **pp.69-70,** section 4.4 on **pp.93-4,** and section 5.5 on **p.104.**

Part Three draws upon the lessons learned from the study and opens by addressing the specific issues raised in the Terms of Reference. This is followed by a framework for analysis of the underlying causes of gender discrimination affecting women, to draw attention to areas which current assistance is not addressing, and to highlight a possible route to identify the most 'at risk' women. The complexity of the conflict in Afghanistan, and its ensuing instability make it difficult to pinpoint specific approaches or type of assistance for each region. For this reason, we have sought instead to clarify some underlying principles to guide relevant and effective projects. These conclude chapter 6.

6.1 CONCLUSIONS ON ISSUES RAISED IN TERMS OF REFERENCE

Outreach is as yet very limited with the exception of vaccination. In terms of proportion of direct female beneficiaries of aid to total population, current assistance is probably very small. In the absence of any centralised source of accurate, disaggregated data on women as direct or indirect beneficiaries, a numerical estimate would be pretentious. While peri-urban areas are beginning to be within the 'aid belt', support to rural areas is fragmented and nowhere near reaching demand or apparent need. There is a strong impression that NGOs reach further into rural areas than do UN agencies. This results from their greater independence from constraints of tighter security and insurance regulations, and the historical interest in rural (mujahideen) as opposed to central ('government') locations of interest.

Relevance The types of assistance offered targets appropriate sectors - health, (non-formal) education, poverty alleviation - but does not necessarily match the specific stated needs of women. This is because women are virtually ignored in identification of needs, and usually throughout the rest of the project cycle. We need to be mindful that imposed aid - like imposed peace - may not be exactly what is wanted.

Women's priority health interest is for preventive reproductive health care - provided by women professionals; they also value training on cost-saving preventive health for children (diarrhoea, respiratory infections). Vaccinations - if they receive this service - are not what they have in mind; they want 'hands on' support. This priority interest was particularly strong in rural areas where present support remains extremely limited and where women's anxieties and lack of knowledge about the human body and basic good practices could so easily be supported by well-trained village level health workers. That this outreach has not given priority attention can only be explained by the fact that all decision making is in the hands of men - both indigenous, and within aid agencies. (See p.78 for detailed summary on current Health programming.)

Illiterate as well as educated women want education for their children - girls as well as boys. In some rural areas women say their daughters would go to school if the local 'commander' took a

lead. Children's education takes precedence over they own desire for literacy, which is high in urban areas. Women do not want to see daughters having to repeat their own dependency, which inhibits their capacity and confidence to deal with their (sometimes rare) visits to urban services. This was strongly evidenced by the fact that many adult women will send their illiterate adolescent daughters to replace them in literacy classes - quite often at cost of undertaking the additional household chores themselves. (See p.83 for detailed summary on current Education services.)

Poverty alleviation is highly relevant everywhere, but particularly demanded by women in the east and the capital - reflecting major centres of displacement.. There are substantial reservations about whether current income generation projects are fulfilling women's needs in this regard, and particularly so in cities where unsupported women (widows, and wives of sick, old, or disabled men) need realistic and sustainable opportunities for independent survival of themselves and an average of four to six children. (See p, 91 for key points on current Income Generation projects.)

Key problems here are inadequate assessment of market opportunities (which is not easy in a deflated economy), and quality and duration of skills training. Bearing in mind the present widespread deflated economic position in Afghanistan, the traditional handicrafts of women are currently unlikely to provide sufficient or sustainable income without an external market. They may have variable value in rural and urban areas. In rural areas women may gain useful contributions to her family needs; she more probably has partial support, at least of shelter, from her extended family. In urban areas, conflict has already caused major disruption and destruction and there appear to be high numbers of unsupported women. Poverty poses even greater threat to the integrity of her family of children, and incomes need to be more substantial and sustainable.

Presently, for example, in Kabul where widows are a recognised major 'at-risk' group, tailoring competes with (presently more skilled) men who would need to be supported to find alternative income sources because of new restrictions[1] on their service for women. In Jalalabad, another area where women gave poverty alleviation as their priority interest, women themselves recognise there is already a glut of tailors. Solutions in these cases need to go beyond present fields of expertise. This is one area where the interests of women must be combined with sound external advice and experience. Because of traditional restrictions on women's mobility, Afghan women themselves - who often input ideas into such projects - have limited vision of market opportunities for products which are within their range of skills and possibly of locally available resources.

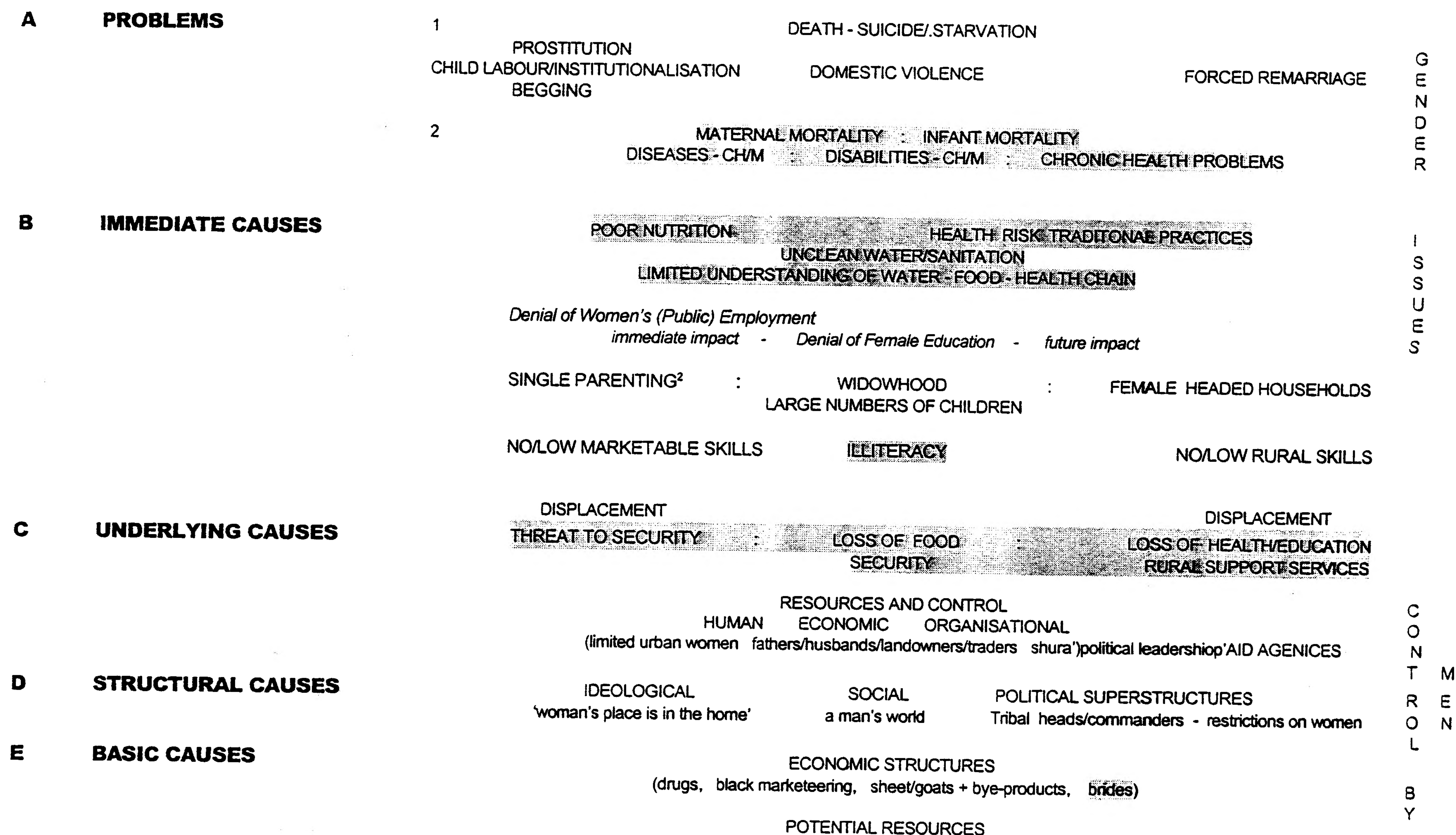
New approaches may better focus on the family as the unit of income generation, but ensure that within it women's status is positively enhanced. For poor women with unemployed husbands, approaches might include both genders to reduce the burden of work on women, to reinstate the status of men as breadwinners to avoid their negative reaction to women's employment, and in order to build respect for women's contribution in a practical way. For women in the position of the widows of Kabul, assistance may follow a similar pattern - by targetting the whole family, including the children. This is not to condone child labour, but the reality of necessity to find even a piece of bread, appears to be forcing women to allow their children to undertake street work or possibly even institutionalise them. This further marginalises women, as well as children, from the wider values of society.

Effectiveness This study was not an evaluation, and thus lacks the focus and more stringent assessment criteria that would accompany such a process. Based on observations, and discussions with women, there are strong indications that In terms of stated goals of 'bringing women into development', the majority of current projects targetted at women are not effective.

There are three key reasons for this. First, women are rarely asked what they want; agencies decide what is good for them, and then continue to treat them as passive beneficiaries. Second,

[1] Many in fact continue their trade, operating from home.

Figure 2: Analytical framework on causes of gender discrimination against women in Afghanistan (1996)[1]



Highlights - current interventions

[1] This is a first attempt, and any contributions to refining understanding would be welcomed.
[2] Widows Unsupported by extended family

poor project planning skills on the part of agency staff hinder thorough problem identification, selection of appropriate strategies of implementation, and any monitoring indicators of progress of success. (For proposed stages of project cycle, see pp.42-44.) Third, the lack of awareness of gender issues and skills in analysis mean that assistance does not clearly enough define disparities between women and men's access or control, and thus limits material benefits, and side-steps status benefits altogether. (For the improvements to be gained by a gender perspective, see 3.2.4 on pp.52-55.)

Gender perspectives in current projects and programming superficially exist insofar as women have been identified as a special case because of their disadvantaged position in relation to men. Gender concerns are included in the goals, objectives and activities of project documents - reflecting the overall emphasis on 'doing' rather than sound planning and measuring progress or success. Women's participation is omitted from needs assessments and project identification - often in the unvalidated belief that their views are represented by the men who are consulted; once their project is started, their views are not sought during implementation.

Monitoring indicators scarcely exist and those that do, reflect the agency's performance in terms of numbers reached, rather than the beneficiaries' achievement in terms of benefits being provided. This particular lack is not exclusive to women's programming; it is common to almost all assistance programmes. Similarly, evaluations have not been undertaken, though a small number of agencies are beginning to consider their need.

There are a handful of projects for women which have incorporated at least elements of a gender perspective. While all leave room for improvement there are important first examples of what is possible with commitment and understanding. These have achieved women's participation in needs assessment, resulted in women mobilising themselves to take further action in their own interests, and in gaining sufficient influence within their communities to be consulted by male leadership on key community issues. (See 3.2.5, pp.55-62.)

A key reason for the lack of gender perspectives is that agencies have not equipped themselves with the necessary understanding and skills to do the job of programming for women. Pressurised substantially by donor agencies to ensure that principles of equality in participation and benefit are achieved, they have reacted hastily within the cultural constraints and without drawing upon established development theory. Although theory should never take precedence over practice, the reverse is also true. 'Women's programming' requires specific skills - in gender awareness and analysis; it is not merely a case of 'Add women and stir'.

A significant obstacle has been the paucity of international female staff, particularly within the UN family where a mere 14 women are contributing to programming in Afghanistan (not all specifically on women's interests) compared with over 70 men. This does not mean that men cannot - and should not - undertake gender responsive programming; they must. But within the known cultural constraints, women are essential to reach women. National female staff are indispensable, but they too lack the specific knowledge and skills needed to bring about positive change in the condition and position of their beneficiaries and themselves. Qualified international women are essential to support this process.

Best intervention strategies to addressing women's needs and interests have been achieved through community level approaches. Key factors are agency commitment to equality of support to women and men, support and involvement of leadership (inevitably male), international female management and national female implementation staff, female and male coordinating staff, good knowledge of the roles and relationships within the particular community, segregated processes and activities. Additional positive factors are good community cohesion, and the presence of influential women who can support female networking (see 2.1.3, pp.17-19).

The three examples of women achieving higher levels of community involvement, described in 3.2.5, were achieved by some form of community process. While best outcomes result from a full participative process of consultation with men and women (undertaken separately), and subsequent facilitation of women to realise their own potential and support translation of their ideas into practice (as done in the third example given in 3.2.5), it is recognised that the commitment of time and resources to achieve this are not available to every organisation. Much can be achieved by quite modest steps, through female networks.

This is illustrated in the example describing women's participation (see 3.2.5, p.56). Here, male and female patients attending a village health clinic were used to reach into family homes, with further mobilisation of women achieved by influential women such as traditional birth attendants. A similar process is undertaken by men to ensure that family views are heard, rather than those only of male leadership. Needs and interests are fed back via the same male and female networks to the male and female clinic staff. Health clinic staff are the facilitators between the community interests, community leadership, and supporting agencies.

Although a comprehensive community support programme is identified from this process - with a particular focus on considering women, individual project implementation is phased, with each involving different partners and beneficiaries. The only 'constant' is one lead agency responsible for the initial facilitation and programme preparation; ideally it should continue to take a monitoring role throughout the programme cycle, but if project plans are properly developed, then any competent partner could take on that role at a later stage. This approach allows short-term projects by 'relief' agencies to run alongside longer-term projects by 'development' agencies; service delivery, capacity building, and community approaches all have a contribution to made.

Health - as outlined above - and water supply (as the second example in 3.2.5, pp.57-8) are key entry points; they are usually priority interests (often reflecting male and female perceptions) and can be linked together. Every water and sanitation project in Afghanistan (of which there are many in both urban and rural areas), that does not **directly** involve women (see 3.2.3, p.49-52) is a wasted opportunity to improve both condition and status of women. As women may - and the uncertainty is to be noted - use, or delegate a child to fetch, some water from a new potable supply, this does not stop them continuing to draw water from unclean sources if (a) it is within their domestic compound, or (b) it tastes better. Minimally, they frequently use the latter case for tea making and hasty domestic use (which will almost certainly include children), which does not eliminate all health risks. The fancy new supply can be reserved for men and guests. In the current absence of data from water supply projects to support their objectives of subsequent improvements in quality of life - for example by reference to quantitative health indicators for related diseases in children - their effectiveness must remain under question.

Illiterate women (or men), particularly beyond city boundaries, do not fully understand the linkage between water, food, health. There is room for a sound training package, at a very simple level of explanation and made relevant to everyday lives of women - including adaptability to very localised circumstances. This could usefully also include sections targetting men, and targetting children, so that the whole community becomes part of the process of improving their their quality of life. Such a process is essential tocomplement the technical input provided by the water supply, if it is to achieve its intended impact.

There is need to make this a standard part of every water/sanitation project, and its necessity to be part of the original problem identification. There us particular need to insist that this is delivered by women to women within the community. There is a need to adopt a consistent policy of 'no training for women, no water supply'. These arguments will be more convincing if it obvious that the organisation does itself have women members, if its staff members understand and are committed to the principles of gender equality and the practical need of integrating technical and social

solutions to human problems, if they have facts from the local community on loss of life or ill health or costs involved to support their arguments in a practical way.

This is both a challenge and an opportunity that agency staff need to be equipped to perform.

Creative solutions to circumventing local regulations. Three major strategies have been adopted to deal with major authority restrictions on women: defeatism, adaptation, and advocacy (see 3.3, pp.62-65 and summary Table 8 on p.66). Within a gender perspective to programming, there is room for all three. Any likely tendency in the light of political obstruction, to opt at the present time for defeatism (on grounds that the obstacles are too great and therefore addressing gender issues must wait for the moment) must be discouraged. This is the attitude that has widely prevailed until now - particularly within UN agencies - and has led to the credibility of their commitment to women being seriously questioned. There will be justifications for a defeatist strategy, but these need to be explained in the context of a clearly stated policy, strategy, and operational guidelines which are necessary for the UN to present a clear, consistent and unified approach.

Advocacy is presently under-utilised as a strategy, being applied in its narrowest sense of 'campaigning' through dialogue with senior authority representatives. This level of advocacy needs to continue in order to build bridges between what are currently two opposing views on women's position in society. It needs to be significantly strengthened by the support of a permanently resident human rights professional. This does not denigrate the committed efforts now being made by senior UN representatives since the fall of Kabul. It reflects the fact that the task justifies full-time attention, specialised skills and knowledge, and patience which more likely can be found with a single-focussed responsibility than it is realistic to expect of others with multiple demands made upon them. Present experiences suggest that particular knowledge must include a sound understanding of Islamic values and views on human rights charters and conventions, and a willingness to find common grounds of understanding within the particular extremist interpretations adopted by the Taliban Movement.

A relevant fact here is that some of its key members arose from the mujahideen movement, which developed in revolt against the reforms of the soviet occupation. The UN was very much seen by mujahideen to be supporting the 'government' (because it was largely confined to urban locations) and, doubtless, sympathetic to - if not influencing - their 'western, corrupting, and un-Islamic' values and behaviour' which included substantial reforms to improve the rights of women. The UN starts from a doubly disadvantaged position to build trust.

Advocacy at a more local level appears to have been more successful when presented in a less confrontational way - meaning that it has surrounded a practical issue for which arguments (eventually) had meaning for the individuals addressed. Where positive results have been achieved, it has followed considerable time taken to establish mutual respect and to confirm committed sincerity. These are 'glow worms' in the dark rather than torches, but represent a start. Examples reported to the study team were health related, or in the interests of 'widows' although these often included other poor women. Interestingly they have allowed training of women by men in rare cases, and female literacy sometimes euphemistically called 'health education'. Negotiators have included male expatriates, and national men -most successfully from the region whose interests were being discussed.

At the non-political level, greater opportunities exist for advocacy at the level of implementation - meaning that we demonstrate equality in what we do, rather than in what we say. The use of water supply as an opportunity for equal participation of women and men is an example. This is an approach that has not been sufficiently explored. Potential - and need - exists in rural health where more MCH support could include at least specific clinics for men. Income generation also offers

PART TWO

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Over several weeks we were privileged to share women's views of these struggles. As women, as human beings - we have felt their pain, and we have cried with them. But we have also been touched by Afghan women's dignity, by their humour, by their energy, by their insights.

The majority of readers of this report, many working to assist these women, have never had the opportunity for face to face talk with them. The gulf between Afghanistan's women and most readers, aid providers, is understandable. But it is not totally excusable. Women, even if physically distances, are not an issue: they are people. And they account for at least half of the people we are all meant to reach. In Part 2 our aim in presenting this report has been threefold: to provide description, to offer analysis, and to expose readers to those unheard voices. For this reason the presentation is both more detailed, and less formal, than might be expected of a standard report.

Readers are reminded that this was a study, essentially research, and not an evaluation. Throughout this report we draw extensively upon our observations of work in progress, and input from the many women, both project supervisors and beneficiaries, whom we encountered. Inevitably we saw things of which we were critical, and in this report we have made reference to them. We have done this where we felt that the problem was not unique, but representative of a repeated misunderstanding which demanded attention. However we are equally aware that we are but human and our snapshot views may have fallen on a bad day, or had missed a wider context which was not explained either in project documents or by staff met. To avoid unintended offence, we have not identified the agencies concerned.

A primary intention in the report was been to avoid a 'fixation on success' because this gives false confidence, prevents concern with positive impact, and above all it denies learning. In general we found that agencies were not good at self reflection, and they were very hesitant about sharing 'bad experiences'. This is unfortunate: 'mistakes' are a valuable learning tool. It is in this spirit that we have drawn upon negative observations. If agencies believe they recognise themselves and feel we have misrepresented them, we apologise. But we also ask that they read again and reflect upon how we could have 'got it wrong': this may be worth knowing, and sharing.

Chapters 2 and 3 address issues of access. Chapter 2 focusses on the constraints on women in terms of the social, family and political environments. For aid agencies, these are the external obstacles which reflect attitudes and behaviour which human societies change as an evolving process, over periods of time which are not predictable. A good understanding of the prevailing values can at least refine programming for women in terms of who, where, and how. This leads into Chapter 3 which reports more comprehensively on how women are presently being reached. Present strategies are described, and commentary given on their effectiveness in achieving the participation of women. Issues of female resources are also included here. Chapter 4 combines issues of relevance and effectiveness, and draws extensively on what women themselves had to say about current assistance, and on their needs and interests. Chapter 5 returns to constraints, but focusses on those within our organisations and over which we can more immediately effect change in order to bring the women of Afghanistan into development. If in Part 2 we can succeed in changing readers' perceptions of women in Afghanistan from an issue into human beings, then we will feel we have made a valuable first contribution.

Part 3 provides overall conclusions (Chapter 6), and recommendations for future programming (Chapter 7). While more work is needed than is possible within the terms of reference of this study to develop these recommendations, some initial guidelines are provided as a starting point towards refining agency policies and project practices to begin to put a gender perspective on assistance to Afghanistan. Although written with United Nations agencies in mind, much is equally relevant to the non-government agencies.

good possibilities of integrating the respective tasks and skills of men and women - albeit separately.

Finally, advocacy is also evidenced by what we as agencies do. This means we need more women throughout our organisations to raise awareness of their existence, to demonstrate that they are valued as well as valuable contributors to the provision of assistance at all levels. This needs to include senior decision making and representation, and particularly at meetings with all authorities in Afghanistan, including the Peace Mission. Without exception, every group of women met throughout the study brought up the issue of peace - and the UN's role in negotiating it. Their resentment that current conflict reflects the sole interests of men is perhaps the greatest gender issue in Afghanistan. And this needs to be taken up by the UN Peace Mission in the same way that other UN agencies are now concerning themselves with women's interests.

Adaptive strategies have proven to be the most successful at maintaining assistance to women, and employment of national staff. They have largely, although not exclusively, worked within the permitted sector (health), and provided segregated work space for women, specialised transport, and ensured the presence of an international female for technical and management support and liaison with male colleagues and senior officers. While none of these women has had an easy task - and several have suffered direct humiliations and beatings from Taliban authority representatives, they have not always received adequate support from their own agencies. A list of requirements for female staff in the present context is included at the end of section 3.4, p.68,

Key lessons to be learnt from the more successful projects for women is that it is necessary to operate within the widely accepted norms of segregation from men, permission of men, and hence cooperation of men. Perhaps the most significant example of how effective this can be is that to be drawn from the Case Study on Mobilisation where women themselves carefully considered the issues sensitive to their more conservative community men, and working within these gained men's support to set up their own independent women's group for literacy and Qu'ranic study. Some may want to call this compromise; it could equally be called a 'focussed challenge' - meaning that we start with something that represents a change, but a small one that is not seen to be too threatening. The Case Study on Empowerment (p.59) illustrates how a similar strategy - of segregated, women's only activities - has over time (16 months at the time of visiting) led to the respect of the male community leaders who now consult the Forum on key community issues. Having succeeded with one model, several others have now been requested and developed in other districts of the city.

It seems reasonable to suggest that at the level of implementation adaptive strategies have sound potential, but need to be undertaken within a solid gender framework and supported over time to achieve real impact for women. As many communities outside the urban centres are keen for support, including for women, this strategy warrants more exposure.

The link between the rural interest and the urban obstacles by way of restrictive authorities needs careful handling, and here the only answer appears to be flexibility. While some authorities have been willing to turn a blind eye to the realities of women's participation in rural areas (centre, east, and west), others appear to move the situation in and out of focus, making periodic 'clamp downs' on communities which necessitate suspension of support (also west). In cases reported so far, these communities themselves notify agencies when they consider it appropriate (ie secure) for them to return to continue. Although this creates difficulties of meeting planned timeframes, it is a measure of the resilience of beneficiaries' interest.

Main obstacles Without undermining the constraints on women's participation presented by the socio-cultural context, the overwhelming conclusion of the study is that the greatest obstacles are within. Agencies have not equipped themselves with appropriate skills (training in gender

analysis and awareness) or with adequate resources (qualified female international as well as national staff). Additional weaknesses which can be addressed are enhancing planning skills.

Other internal obstacles relate to our own prejudiced attitudes to women, to particular authorities, and to poor communities (see 5.1 - 5.3, pp.99 - 102), a tendency to assume new technical interests in order to reach women but in which we have no expertise, rather than to coordinate with partner agencies to provide an integrated and increasingly beneficial support for women (or for men).

Solutions are (a) training programmes to include gender analysis, project planning, and participative methods for key programming staff at all levels, and gender sensitivity for all other staff to be combined with organisational policies and practices to support equality in the work place; (b) increase in international female implementation staff with interest and skills in gender concerns to support renewed efforts to reinstate into active work all national female staff, with contingency provisions made to support their transport and male guardianship (if required), and clear plans to provide properly equipped work space.; and (c) increased coordination and cooperation between agencies to provide planned, phased, integrated support to women and men.

Potential for informal female networks For programming purposes, the best possible female networks can be initiated by professional women in urban areas, and through influential women in rural areas (see 2.1.3, pp.17 - 19). These require trust on the part of the agency in their intermediary person to develop the network, time to build it, and respect for the personal relationships they inevitably entail. They also call for sincerity on the part of the agency; opportunistic use - and abuse - costs the individuals concerned their reputations, status, and good relations. This sort of networking is widely practiced by female NGOs, who also draw upon their male relatives and their contacts to facilitate travel, security (ie guardian), and accommodation for women.

Such networks originate within urban areas, and with the professional women working in aid or local government offices. To develop them in a more formal way - for example, to make them visible to the aid community - would call for a locally based expatriate women as facilitator, and a purpose to which the local women felt a commitment. That this has not taken place in regional capitals suggests that Afghan women themselves have not particularly recognised a need to become visible to the aid community, beyond what they achieve through the employment of some of their members. The women's associations existing in Kabul and Mazar (all with 'government' connections which has a historical precedent) are examples.

Catalysts for change at the local level From the evidence of the study visits, it appears that key human influences of change are returning refugees from Iran or Pakistan, and the educated internally displaced women from Kabul who already seem to form a significant part of the female aid work force and local representatives in all regions of the country. While the latter themselves say that they take longer to gain the trust of local communities, care needs to be taken that they are acceptable to the community and that they are not asked to start on something that will have to be carried forward by locally resident women. In this case it is essential to have them build local capacity. Sensitivity is cautioned in their selection that this in itself does not increase community tensions.

The question of whether to target returnee communities also needs careful consideration for similar reasons. In making sound sense to build upon what is now sought by most families - particularly education and health services for female as well as male - there are risks that giving priority support to them will create new tensions among the permanently resident communities who may take pride in the fact that they 'stayed on' in their home country and have therefore suffered more. (And there is no doubt that they have suffered much, and many have yet to receive any support.) For these reasons it is not suggested that returnee communities become a specific target .

This suggestion does not exclude the need to be aware of their presence as individuals within mixed communities. Numerical presence or status level are indicators of how much influence they may carry within a mixed community, and they can be approached as individuals - alongside residents - as potential allies.

Maintaining a more open-minded approach to identification of communities likely to support women's participation, is endorsed by our perceptions that poverty itself is a catalyst for change, not only among conservative individual families but also within the more conservative and remote communities. Health - inevitably deteriorated, and clean water supply, are usually two major concerns, and both provide excellent opportunity to involve women from the outset. These opportunities need to be maximised.

6.2 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Living within our own society and culture, we take much for granted and do not even think about why things are this way or that way, or consider the chain of connections which lead to particular actions. To a large degree, we accept that this is the way things are. For our Afghan colleagues, it is difficult for them to explain causes to us - very often of values and attitudes, and behaviours, to which they also unconsciously, or consciously, subscribe. As outsiders in a new society we are constantly trying to make sense of what we see - and find it difficult to make causal connections or appreciate the depth of significance an attitude or behaviour has. Analysis of causes is helpful to disentangle this complexity, and Figure 2 represents the causes of gender discrimination against women.[2] Even as a first model it provides insights into dimensions and linkages which were possibly not previously considered.

6.2.1 Dimensions and implications

Women are part of the economic base of society (see Figure 2- level E, p.114). Particularly in rural areas and among conservative families throughout the country, the practice of bride price remains an essential means of strengthening family and tribal ties, and of redistributing wealth throughout the wider community. While it can bring substantial income to a family (hence the image of 'selling a daughter') - and be used to achieve this in times of crisis, at the point of marriage much of this wealth is reciprocated in a girls's dowry (particularly jewellery), and the associated festivities. Even among families of very modest means, engagements and weddings (as well as deaths) involve hundreds of guests, This apparently lavish display has deeper economic significance.

The distribution of gifts; the services of cooks, barbers, musicians; and purchase of vast quantities of meat, rice, flour and oil, all contribute to a redistribution of wealth throughout the community. The feasting supports food distribution to substantial numbers of people including the poor; the rare opportunity to eat meat heightens anticipation among today's impoverished families. The celebration strengthens communities and aims to sustain peaceful coexistence. The status of both girl and boy (both often still under 18 years) are publicly defined by the lavishness of the occasion. This contributes they are subsequently regarded by the community. For the girl this is especially important, as she moves to her husband's family; the attitudes of his wider family members will be greatly influenced by t how her well her father endowed her, and how well her mother trained her to fulfil her domestic role.

Even within the enormous economic constraints experienced in Afghan communities today, and the difficulties families face in raising necessary cash and goods, relatively lavish functions continue. The explanation is that failure to give out invitations to families with whom similar occasions have already been celebrated, will cause insult. In times of conflict this needs to be avoided. Additionally, it will

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[2] This is a first attempt and would undoubtedly benefit from critical input - to *Gender Resource Centre for Afghanistan*, c/o UNDP Kabul in Islamabad, Pakistan.

indicate that the family is impoverished; this will bring about loss of status, of respect, and - very importantly - of credibility which in times of major need can assure a loan.

Afghanistan remains dominantly a tribal society, organised into ethnic divisions which, in a fragmented way, have formed uncertain political alliances. With the exception of black marketeering which is resourced from external economies, the present internal economy continues to be substantially derived from agriculture (notably illicit crops), herd animals and the exchange of brides. Women's 'mystery', purity, and value are likely to remain high (as it is seen through local eyes), and the means of maintaining these is through the practice of *purdah* (see 2.1, and footnote 1, p.11). It seems highly probable that these values and practices will continue as essential features of social organisation until such time as alternative economic resources can replace the many social needs they serve.

This basic cause has ***relevance to the issue of segregated offices***. Most political authorities have demanded women's work space to be segregated from men (see 2.3), and this is a requirement of the Taliban Movement who now control two thirds of the country, including four out of its five major cities.

When, as agencies, we challenge this requirement, we are viewing the situation very much from an external perspective, of what might be objectively 'right' on the basis of internationally recognised standards. To outsiders, it may seem a superficial restriction denying gender equality which very much impedes the work we came to do. To insiders - and specifically the more conservative members - the mixing of men and women strikes right at the core of their survival, their identity, and their ideology. It was for just such reasons that the same mujahideen rose against the soviets.

Given that Afghanistan is at the bottom of the Gender Empower Measure (see p.3), we have to ask 'Is this issue the best place to start?' We might consider the positions taken by women themselves..

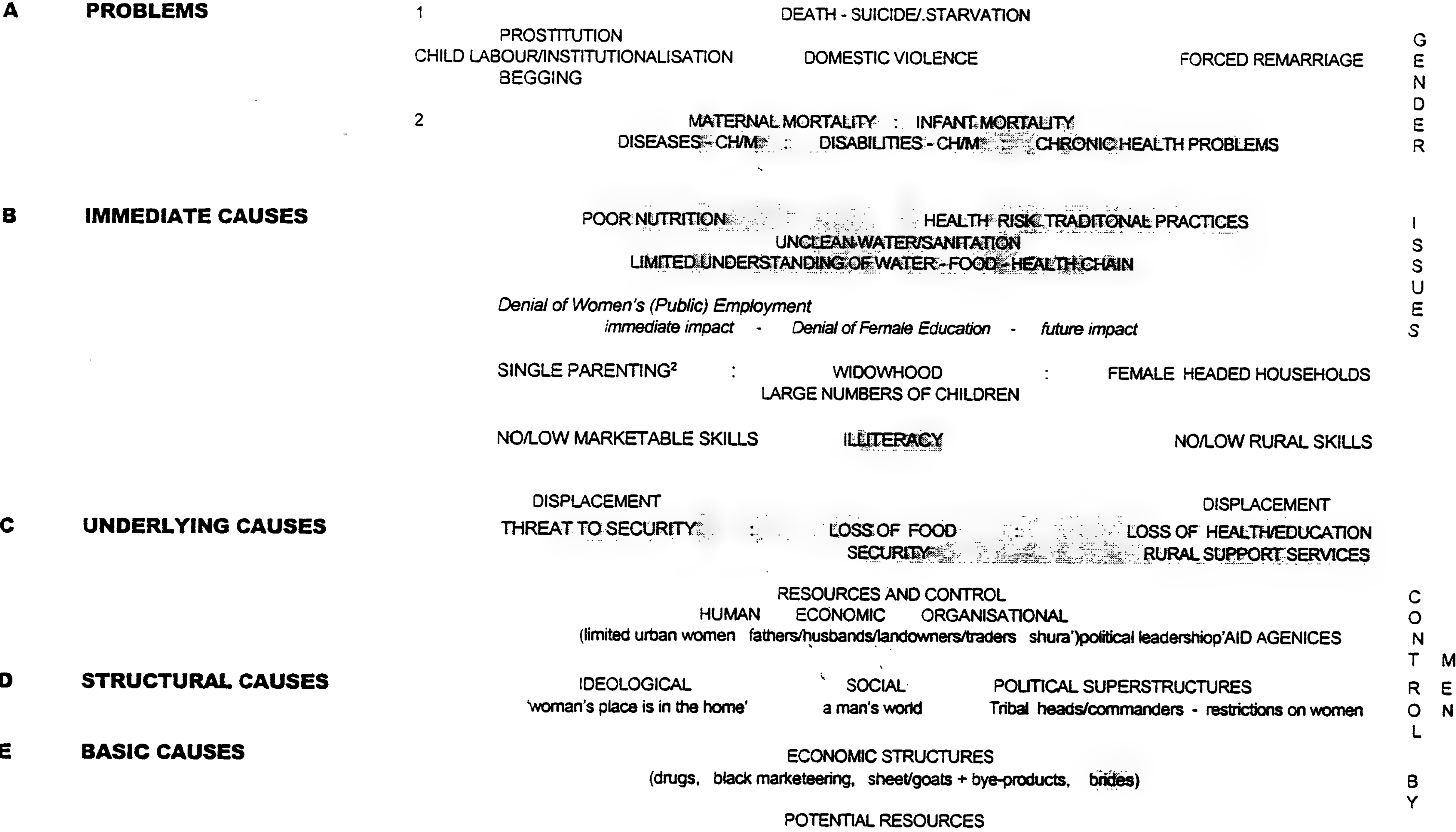
UN female national staff were party to the March 1996 policy statement, which sent them home on full pay, on grounds that they must be able to work alongside male colleagues both to comply with policies of gender equality, and for practical considerations of efficiency of work. As months passed, and some UN agencies acquired international female staff, practices differed. A small number of UN agencies arranged for female staff either to work from home to project location, or within female sections of hospitals or clinics. Female staff changed their positions - albeit reluctantly - to accept compromises in the light of continued restrictions on women, to relieve boredom at home, and to secure ongoing contract and salaries. Many now complain about lack of proper facilities and resources which are almost impossible to have within overcrowded, non-serviced family homes, and little better in most war-wasted institutions. Although not within UN offices, all such arrangements are totally segregated from men. Thus, without acknowledging an adaptive strategy to work space for staff, part of the UN family actually adopted it. They have done so to fulfil mandates to provide assistance to women.

This in fact brings them closer to the position earlier adopted by NGO agencies (see 2.3, Nangarhar province and 3.3, Herat) who sought to provide some form of segregated work space for female staff (see Adaptive strategy, p.66). While NGO female staff do not like the authority restrictions, they felt valued by the agency's concern to secure continued opportunities. They too see these measures as necessary adjustments to continue reaching out to women as well as securing their own incomes. The presence of international female staff was pivotal in providing essential support.

Non-aid professional women (Herat, Jalalabad, Kabul) are absolutely clear about their priorities. First they want to work; where and what has to be worn are very secondary (see also p.19). While those now experiencing new restrictions resent the limitations on their necessary interactions with professional men, they find their own means of achieving these through family networks.

Women's associations in Kabul (pre Taliban) historically adopted segregation is a point of policy because it provided greater opportunities to develop themselves, and was acceptable to men.

Figure 2: Analytical framework on causes of gender discrimination against women in Afghanistan (1996)[1]



[1] This is a first attempt, and any contributions to refining understanding would be welcomed.

[2] Widows Unsupported by extended family

From the above we have a spectrum of responses on the central importance to professional women of segregated offices. Those who object strongest are outside the country (Pakistan-based national UN women); UN in-country women have moved to compromise; those who work in non-aid sectors accept it as part of normal working life. While women do not necessarily like this - and thus it is a gender issue - they have made different choices. They all have given priority to the right to work, and have chosen to adapt on office location in order to pursue the priority goal.

If the use of a segregated office is not a key gender issue for professional women of Afghanistan in their present socio-political context, then there is little justification for the UN to make it into one. We ought seriously to consider the lead of Afghan women and rather than challenge authorities on an issue which is so fundamentally important to them, we could consider segregated offices as an adaptive non-challenging strategy in order to achieve a greater goal, which is to advocate for women's right to work, and security for them to work in a segregated environment.

Several advantages can be gained for UN agencies by such an arrangement. Due to a lack of international staff to undertake liaison, and unsatisfactory home-based arrangements for national staff, women's project opportunities were delayed or not taken up. This has led to some inter-agency cooperation, with complex networks of visits between offices, residences, and project sites. Such an arrangement would provide female staff with full services and facilities under one roof, so that they have a professional work environment. And within their own work space, they have greater opportunity to develop their management capacities. To do this require a centralised inter-agency facility for which one agency needs to take a coordinating role.

At the *structural level (D),* all is dominated by men, but on a localised basis because of their ongoing war. While here we have given a very generalised picture, more specific ideas on, say, health can clarify the depth of resistance to change, and ways in which we might approach the problem. A key point to note here is that In the absence of a central government, judiciary, or law enforcing agencies, there can be no legislation to define or defend the position of women. And that all major political interests impose restrictions on women. Equally it is important to recognise that any *potential* national government must acknowledge its obligations to UN conventions and charters to which it is already party. Principles of gender equality are an essential component of all of these, and authorities need to understand this.

Underlying causes are also beyond the control of women, although a few contribute to the available human resources. With all organisational structures destroyed or substantially depleted because of war, women's work contribution is diminished, although some may have found employment within aid agencies who now substantially replace government departments. There is a significant increase inwomen's burden of work in maintaining the welfare of the whole family, physically as well as emotionally, often with significantly reduced amenities. This is particularly the case in urban areas where women are suddenly thrown into a backward 'rural-like' lifestyle of which they possibly have no experience. These factors may be compounded by threat of conflict or unfamiliarity through displacement, which increase restrictions on women's mobility - making it even more difficult to reach assistance. In these circumstances women have limited time - though probably increased need - to take part in projects. They need to fit these around essential household demands.

The range of immediate causes and manifestation of problems are common to all women, though will differ in degree according to the local situation. For example, we chose for illustrative purpose to indicate poor nutrition as more of an urban than rural problem on grounds of higher population density, lower access to agricultural land, and subject to higher costs due to transporting from elsewhere. Shortages due to lines of conflict may reduce supplies and increase costs. Mother is likely to be the last person to be fed, and therefore reeceives least. Clearly this is not consistently the case and such analysis must be localised. The purpose was to contrast this with risks to health through

traditional practices, which might be more likely found within rural communities who have had little exposure to education or institutional services.

Major factors contributing to problems will be proximity to conflict, social status of individuals, family size and membership, exposure to education, and urban or rural location. This distinction is worthy of consideration because it can highlight degrees of vulnerability among women in the two environments.

6.2.2 Degrees of vulnerability, and unrecognised problems

Combinations of causes can be indicators of 'at risk' women who ought to be our target group of vulnerable women. These will vary between urban and rural areas, but also within urban areas they may vary between districts according to populations displacement, bombings, or hands-on conflict.

In urban areas, 'high risk' women are displaced, single parents (meaning women with no present support from extended family) with large numbers of children, who are denied rights to employment, have limited understanding of water-food-health links, and have no marketable skills. In addition to increased risks to health, possible ultimate outcomes include begging and child labour or institutionalisation - which are already substantiated in Kabul. Prostitution arising from destitution - possibly even by adolescent girls - was verbally reported in Kabul during early 1996, but never fully acknowledged due to social and religious attitudes. Aid agencies also have coyly avoided the issue.

In rural areas, 'high risk' women are displaced (hence low community ties), female-headed households (for whom it is more difficult to establish community ties; many widows seem to have extended family) with many children, and no rural skills. Widows among this category are likely to enter a second marriage to survive, or under family pressure to reduce their own economic burden.

While all the pressures of war can contribute to domestic violence within intact families (and is reported by hospital workers and patients), a second marriage can lead to major argument about existing children. Boys may end up working the streets, or being despatched to institutional care; girls appear to remain at home as unpaid servants, and may be victims of domestic violence - or worse.

The ultimate problems for women can be suicide (isolated incidents have been 'reported' to agency staff), or death by starvation due to prolonged malnourishment, which may be the fate of old widows (see concerns on this in 2.2.3, p.24) among very poor families.

As was noted during the study (see 2.2.1, p.23), all women enjoy the opportunity to meet together as a group, in particular widows who appear to use the opportunity for mutual support, and growth into their new social roles as women without men. This makes us aware that we know little of women's stress (or indeed of men's) , or of their traditional coping strategies. These, together with the above represent a range of problems for women which, with the exception of widows, we are not yet even acknowledging. A particular concern ought to be providing support to enable single mothers to keep their family intact, for the well-being of all concerned.

6.2.3 Focus of current programming interest

A framework of causes can help us recognise what we are doing, and what we are not doing. As the section has pointed out, there are additional problems for which have not yet been acknowledged. A second observation is that all of our assistance is targetted at the problem end, particularly those problems listed under number 2, which reflect 'technical' solutions usually given as service delivery. If the aim is to effect change, and particularly change in social attitudes and values, than all levels need to be addressed.

Currently very limited efforts are being made at levels C and below - which represent the root cause of all the problems. Some limited effort is being addressed to underlying causes, and includes capacity building of women[3]. Given that women professionals are significantly fewer than men, there needs to be more interest here. In the health sector, there is an acute shortage of solidly qualified professionals - particularly surgeons and anaesthetists among others. These would be essential if one were planning the necessary ideal linkages from village level birth attendant, through district health clinics and maternity services up to urban hospital where care, by women, ought to become available. An exceptional case in this regard has been the professional level training provided for physiotherapists, and prosthetists to deal with gender segregated treatment of disabilities which are also supported at Level B through social mobilisation and Level A through technical service delivery.

Interventions at the D Level are also limited, currently targeting only political authorities. While advocacy, as outlined earlier, should be cross-cutting and evident at all levels, it also needs to show a horizontal coherence. Traditional leaders, community leaders, fathers and husbands, and mullahs need to be included in some way.

The purpose of an analytical framework to look at women's situation is not to make exclusive choices to deal with problems, or to address causes. Its purpose is to enable us obtain a more holistic picture and adopt a more holistic approach. This is necessary to provide the best environment within which to work with women, to support them to recognise their own situation, and to mobilise themselves to make plans to address their own well-being and personal growth.

6.3 PROPOSED GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVED SUPPORT TO WOMEN

The findings of this study have provided a wide range of issues for agencies to address. Far from endorsing the starting point that the greatest problem to programming for women is the traditional seclusion of women, the evidence indicates that the key obstacles are within our own agencies. They are thus within our control. By addressing these, and building on what we have learned, there is substantial potential to develop the capacity to provide effective support to positively change the condition and position of women in Afghanistan. In order to do so, three conditions need to be recognised.

6.3.1 Necessary conditions to be recognised by UN agencies to support women

- **Afghanistan remains a country in conflict which is complex and changing. Flexibility is essential.**

As witness to this is the fact that only days after completing field visits, the Taliban Movement gained control of Jalalabad and the eastern provinces, and subsequently of the capital, Kabul. Restrictions on female employment, education and all-concealing outer dress are enforced with unprecedented physical threat and action by an autonomous religious police. Men are arbitrarily inspected for beards of the appropriate fisted-hand length and removal of all other pubic hair, and whipped to public prayer regardless of their private practice. Children are forbidden toys representing living forms, and even kite flying. Forced entry into homes - to check for weapons, televisions, cassettes - and arbitrary arrest of men thought to support the Opposition, are further violations of all rights to security, to privacy, to justice. Actions in Kabul far exceed the Movement's 'installation' in Jalalabad, or elsewhere, and it is difficult to know whether this can be attributed purely to its perceptions of the capital as 'western, corrupting, and un-Islamic', or partly fuelled by issues of ethnicity.

As elsewhere, the population welcomes the mass disarmament, the end of strife and uncertainty generated by power-lusty commanders. Otherwise the struggle for revival in the capital has

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[3] Skills training is not considered here; present approaches do not consciously address or actually achieve this.

become one of survival. Meagre incomes have been lost by all women in government service; Around 70% of Kabul's teachers - some 7,793 women - are removed from their vital role of educating future generations. 103,256 girls are denied education, and 148,223 boys also seriously affected because of loss of female teaching staff[4]. Even health support, officially permitted, is reduced because of restrictions on women's use of public transport, and fear of harassment both outside and even inside place of work. Unemployment has also increased among men who worked as barbers, tailors (no longer allowed to interact with women), butchers (meat has a fixed sales price irrespective of its purchase price), musicians (whose performance is considered un-Islamic), as well as a variety of service providers such as housing agents (whose fee is seen as 'interest' which is forbidden by Islam) and opportunists such as money exchangers who are now obliged to use Taliban-fixed rates and forbidden to give lower rates for old notes. All poverty in the household impinges upon women who still have responsibility to feed the family.

Widows - of whom Kabul has over 50,000 - have been doubly victimised: not only are they forbidden paid employment, but they have lost access to food aid which must now be collected by male relatives. The fact that many are without male relatives is denied as impossible within Afghan culture. Beggary by women is at unseen levels; boys working the streets are said to have increased, and many become victims of land mines.

As under all political authorities throughout Afghanistan's years of war, the 'peace' brought by the Taliban is maintained by force of the gun. But the real dimension of the Taliban control cuts far deeper than concern for physical well-being. This is the threat to spiritual well-being which the Taliban reinforce by claiming all behaviours other than those conforming to its own narrow view, as anti-Islamic. This is the coercive force which inhibits response,

In this context there is great need to maintain flexibility in programming. It implies a clear recognition that political repression of women substantially affects major urban areas at this moment in time. While this exaggerates - and in the case of the Taliban Movement - distorts traditional values (and explains how such restrictions are so readily accepted), it has not prevented emerging indicators of positive social change in rural areas. Many agencies report rural communities where people are demanding water, health, education - and want girls to go to school, and are prepared for women to be involved provided they are segregated from men and projects are implemented by women. (See summary on Catalysts of Change, p.111.). These opportunities appear to be a sound starting point to support a necessary process of change in attitudes and values towards women which ultimately must come from within Afghan society.

Programming needs to be flexible enough to be able to support these two extremes. This will entail a clear role for advocacy as well as implementation. It implies a continued need for community empowering approaches rather than a blanket approach of emergency relief. This would represent a backward step for women. It would only compound the wrongs that have been identified within present approaches to women's support, and would contribute little of substance to their condition and nothing to their position with society.

- **Conservatism is widespread and in the face of intensifying conflict it is likely to increase.**

The over-riding impression of the regional visits (all but Kandahar previously known) was of increasing conservatism. Liberal-mindedness stood out as an exceptional case, but was never so uniform as to be able to say this is a regional or a provincial picture. As conflict stands poised to intensify in the battle for the north, it is likely that women will suffer greater restrictions. In the light of history, the present restrictions on women by several political interests conform to a repeated pattern. In view of the magnitude of reforms imposed by the soviets in the interests of women, so also may the present reaction be severe - as is the ultra-conservatism of the Taliban Movement, and it may be prolonged.

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[4] Source UNCHS/UNHCR/UNICEF Survey of Kabul's Primary, Secondary and High schools , November 1995.

While authority edicts most immediately impact upon liberal urban women (and must be addressed), the majority of women live out their lives within restrictive environments, which differ in degree (and some by a very small margin) but not in kind. All women are weary of war, and all that it entails for them. They are deeply concerned about poverty which means they cannot feed their children; they are concerned about ignorance which has denied them opportunities to overcome that poverty and maintains them in dependency; they are worried about their own health which repeated reproduction, poverty and ignorance all contribute to its deterioration. If assistance is to contribute to the needs - the rights - of the majority of women in Afghanistan - to health, to education, to security, to shelter, to a basic quality of life - then it must prepare to do so within their social context. Women themselves are clear that they are ready to contribute their will and energy if we are there to help them; and they strongly urge that we do.

In order to be proactive, rather than reactive, to the realities of working with women in Afghanistan, the prevailing socio-cultural context indicates that it is necessary to plan within the framework of conservatism, and to work together to turn this challenge into an opportunity to show what can be done.

- **Make a commitment to adopting a gender perspective on programming in Afghanistan.**

The findings presented here clearly indicate that current programming for women lacks a gender perspective which, if applied, could enhance both condition and position of Afghan women in relation to men. While this is desirable in its own right, a gender perspective is recommended for the very reason that it does, if properly applied, consider men as well as women. This increases opportunity to identify projects which can benefit both, but additionally support men's recognition of women's valuable contribution. This can serve to diffuse sensitivity to the interest in 'women's' programmes which is evident among some very conservative communities. As gender responsive programming takes a closer look at local realities, it provides good opportunity to collect information on local traditions, roles and power relations which can help improve all assistance.

What is needed to start this process is commitment. This calls for a unified and consistent response by all UN agencies to the principles of gender equality as stated in March 1996. Without such commitment the current type of support for women, in most cases, will explain jobs but contribute no substantive benefit to the women of Afghanistan.

6.3.2 Proposed guidelines for gender responsive programming to promote women

1 Reinforce and unify UN agencies on commitment to the existing gender framework which states a policy of gender equality , and a strategy of gender mainstreaming, in all work in Afghanistan.

This will entail a clear understanding by all agencies and their staff of the UN Charters and Conventions, and clarification on how they relate to their work.

It will require training for all programming and management staff in gender analysis and for all staff in gender awareness. This is an urgent priority, but must be backed up by ongoing support to programme staff until such time as they are confident and competent to automatically consider gender issues in their work. Particular attention needs to be paid to an understanding of different implementation strategies and their potential use for solving gender issues, and that advocacy for gender equality is something we do, as well as something we can say.

The strategy of mainstreaming gender into all projects and programmes requires translation into practical guidelines relevant to field level implementation to guide their local decision-making about project issues. It is to be noted that mainstreaming does not deny use of women's specific projects, or of projects to address women's biological concerns.

2 WOMEN'S ACCESS TO AID: restricted rights and means

This chapter is about women's access to resources. 'Access' has a two-fold meaning: it implies a *right* of approaching or reaching something, or a *means* of approaching or reaching something. In gender language, access is usually used in the dual sense. If we talk about women's lack of access to resources, we mean that they have no right and therefore they have no means of gaining those resources.

In the context of Afghanistan, the seclusion of women is regarded as the key explanation for their under-representation among beneficiaries; it prevents women's access to resources in the dual sense. Yet our observations tell us that this is not a uniform practice, in either urban or rural areas. In Mazar or Kabul today, women are visibly taking part in paid employment, in voluntary works, in bazaars and - although less common - taking refreshment in cafes (in a female section). Yet in the same cities there are many who rarely leave their households or go out unaccompanied or without concealing their faces and bodies; and many who never attended the widely available schools.

These cities contrast with Jalalabad where women are virtually invisible; very few are spotted in the main bazaars, and all remain invisible under their shuttlecock[1] *burkhas.* The usual explanation given for these urban variations, ethnicity, can only be a partial one. Within the rural areas around Jalalabad, where the same conservative Pushtoon tribes dominate, women will be seen working in the fields with faces exposed; and in turn, this would be unheard of in other rural Pushtoon areas.

If not ethnicity alone, what other factors are responsible for these differences in women's behaviour: is it tradition, education, economy, politics? What are the limits for women: how far do their geographical limits extend outside their home? To what extent are they free to make their own decisions? Does displacement change behaviours? What are the potential catalysts for change? Answers to these sort of questions have implications for our progammes' capacity to involve women in terms of where, how many, who, and how.

This chapter provides some insights into these concerns. Based on observations and discussions of the study, the key influences over women's lives are presented in terms of social, family and political values. While it would be accurate to say that all impose control over women, and thus constrain their access to assistance, it is difficult to define which is the most influential in a particular case. This requires closer analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to 'unpack' some of the complexity of this well-recognised 'obstacle' in order to identify our potential opportunities and refine our expectations.

It would also be incorrect to assume that these values are static. The disruption within Afghan society over the past decade and a half has confused what might at one time have been considered to be the social norm. Individual families have had to revise their values. What was once considered to be a shared traditional value, the seclusion of women, is now a political

[1] So named because of its similar appearance: a small round embroidered skull cap perched on top of the floor-length tightly pleated body veil. Vision is through a small eye grill. The garment is designed to totally conceal the woman inside in order to maintain her purity from the tainting eyes and minds of unrelated men. Her purity is closely bound to danger. Womankind is essentially provocative, and any adornment of her natural charms by way of nice dress, jewellery or make-up are acts of intent to seduce. Man, of course, must be protected from such temptresses - and their own lasciviousness which will inevitably (and justifiably) be aroused at the mere sight of woman. If society were 'clean', then women could go uncovered. Since women are also perceived to be mentally inferior to men, it might be considered to be incumbent upon men to make society 'more clean'. This logic is not sound - in fact man has done what he can; he designed the *burkha*. As all of this is the nature of woman and man, it would seem to be beyond mortal means - or right - to change. Some women feel protected by the anonymity a *burkha* offers..

2 UN agencies in Afghanistan to visibly demonstrate the principles and practices of gender equality in their offices.

It will entail planning a phased increase in female staff at all levels, including senior management; the development of personnel policies to support women generally and to meet the culturally specific needs of national women in particular inside Afghanistan; opportunities to discuss gender issues, and sexual harassment in the work place.

This is 'doing' advocacy in order to support understanding among their own staff. While it is necessary for all men, it is particularly valuable to national male staff who themselves inevitably share some of the cultural values and need support to deal with the social and political pressure that they have to deal with.

3 To back up programming with an inter-related but separate advocacy strategy to be led by a resident human rights representative.

This should aim to build bridges with extremist authorities, with a view to identifying shared values, and explain their relationship to human rights conventions[5]. Simplified as well as full translations of key charters and conventions need to be prepared, in coordination with national human rights organisations. The time, knowledge and skills for this task require specialised staff, distinct from those involved with programming issues. Among Afghans - who must be involved - best candidates might be religious teachers or tribal leaders who are acceptable to ultra-conservative authorities. While all human rights concerns must be represented, special attention is requied to children and women. Children, as the future generation, are key in their own right, but possibly also a useful entry point to women.

At other levels of society, advocacy should adopt a pragmatic approach using examples drawn from programme issues in the local context.

4 Adopt a longer-term approach to support for women in order to enhance their personal growth and confidence, as well as meet material needs, within the social structure.

This can best be achieved within a community-based approach which has greater potential to build trust with men, to integrate male and female needs within the same project to build mutual respect, and which can be undertaken by individual partners at different times. This also lends itself to integration of quick-impact projects (among which many currently provide only short-term material benefit) and more substantive capacity building support. Water and health appear to be the two best entry points.

5 Promote the integrity of the family, with mother as its pivotal member.

This will require coordination between agencies which clearly recognises the expertise that each has to offer, rather than individual agencies seeking to diversity their project interests beyond their field of expertise.

Some particular concerns have already been identified in section 6.2.2 and in the connection of skills training for poverty alleviation which needs to involve men as well as women to reduce risk of negative backlash if men's status as breadwinners is perceived to be challenged.

Specific recommendations to fulfil these guidelines are outlined in Chapter 7.

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[5] This is more a 'bottoms-up' approach since starting from the stand-point of UN Charters is perceived to be alien and non-Islamic - and therefore confrontational - to those who choose to deny knowledge or experience of the world beyond.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

1	**UN to develop a unified gender policy for work in Afghanistan.**[1]

This must:

- consult with UN gender specialists[2] and local Afghanistan expertise
- involve participation of UN field offices, plus NGO and donor agencies
- acknowledge and respect Afghanistan's religious and cultural values
- define realistic agency strategies (of intervention + implementation) + guidelines and indicators to support field level operations
- define human and material resources (who/how many/what) to implement gender strategies
- be reviewed at least annually to assess progress and need for revision.

2	**UN Afghanistan programme to establish a resident human rights representative, distinct from its implemention functionaries.**

This must:

- use advocacy dialogue as a strategy to support, not direct, programming ie projects continue where possible
- consult closely on all issues with donors, NGOs and coordinating bodies
- work with recognised national human rights agencies
- agree a plan of active representation to all Afghanistan authorities on concerns of men, women and children
- cooperate with above to develop simple materials and mechanisms to educate Afghan authorities and communities on basic human rights.

3	**UN agencies to coordinate in assessing their respective expertise with regard to gender responsive programming.**

This must:

- focus on agencies coordinating, rather than diversifying, professional interests
- recognise urban and rural strengths in experience, resources, and capacities
- integrate the respective contributions of development and relief approaches
- confirm who will/will not work through local government institutions, and on what terms
- share outcome of UN review with all agencies across all regions.

4	**UN agencies to maximise benefit to women through integrating sectoral support, and by community (ie male and female) participation.**

This must:

- assign responsibility to one agency for inter-agency coordination in both urban and rural localities.

5	**UN to establish a coordinating unit in main office and each region to support integrated, gender responsive, community based programming.**

This must:

- be a sustainable, cost-effective, **unified**[3] shared resource within the UN
- give priority to female international and national candidates (see item 6)
- maintain broad-based representation of in-country NGOs and donors

- coordinate 7-10 below, plus support needs assessment, monitoring and evaluation.
- If this internal UN unit is not formed, tasks 7-10 could be met by an external agency such as the Advisory Group to the UN on Gender Issues, provided it is properly formalised and strengthened as above, and can address specific agency needs on gender responsive programming.

6	**UN agencies to visibly practise gender equality.**

This means:
- employ more female staff[4], particularly at decision making levels
- provide female (international and national) staff's particular needs in the cultural context (see Chapter 3.4)
- UN to assign no less than 2 international women per region to support local female staff, and each other
- include female participants in all possible UN missions and meetings with Afghanistan authorities, including the Special Mission for Peace
- adopt a firm policy that missions/meetings will not take place if female participation is denied

7	**Training to be planned in gender analysis[5] and in participatory development for different staff levels of UN and NGO agencies.**

This must:
- take place in all regions and be task-related to practically support gender analysis in all stages of projects
- provide ongoing back-up advice for all agencies
- develop training capacities and basic support to each region
- support the identification and resolution of gender issues within the workplace.

8	**In-country workshops to be planned on health, income generation, and education to strengthen actual benefits to women.**

This must:
- include gender analysis to enable participants assess their own projects for actual benefits to women
- review strategies, resources, lessons learned, and brainstorm on opportunities to involve women and men
- identify ways to build upon and sustain women's achievements
- work towards common approaches to reduce competition.

9	**To design and set up systems for data collection and management, and for communications and information sharing.**

This must:
- set up a working group (UN/donor/NGO/local expertise) to identify data needs, + effective systems of support
- standardise all data disaggregated by sex; give training in reliable qualitative and quantitative[6] data collection
- develop an accessible, economic, central data resource centre
- set up a communications system between all regional and head offices to contribute, and exchange information, including between Afghan women.

10	**UN/NGOs to assess female staff training needs in all regions.**

This must:
- consider practical job needs in all stages of project management
- consider coordinated training to reduce individual agency costs

ANNEXES

- develop a training plan for cost-recoverable female capacity building.

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[1] It is recognised that each agency may need to do this in the context of its particular global mandate and gender policy (if defined). As a starting point, this should mean consensus on the basic principle of gender equality enshrined in all UN charters and conventions.*******************

[2] Including UN agency head office gender resources. Input may be highly relevant from Pakistan UN agencies,among whom some (eg UNDP) have specialised gender units.

[3] Here we draw attention to the sensitivity encountered by the study team among communities in several regions to any discussion which might be construed as 'women's rights'. There is real risk that too many people, and irresponsible representation of gender may create or increase community resistance to women's involvement. This can only lead to men increasing their 'protection' of Afghan women.

[4] There appears to be a trend towards recruiting female UN Volunteers. This may be a short-term strategy to increase female international presence in Afghanistan programmes. It ought not to replace efforts by UN agencies to achieve gender equity in recruitment, which would allow to women the same career and remuneration benefits provided to male colleagues.

[5] For local Pakistan-based expertise see *Situation Analysis of Gender Training in Islamic Republic of Pakistan* (March 1966): Japan International Coooperation Agency.

[6] Much of currently available data is guesswork due to undefined monitoring indicators, inadequate reporting procedures, and lack of transparency. Many agency staff appear to feel under pressure to be seen to achieve; a culture of learning - from failures as well as successes - needs to be encouraged.

Extract from TERMS OF REFERENCE

STUDY ON THE ROLE OF UN AGENCIES AND NGOS IN ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN AFGHANISTAN

2 PURPOSE

The main purpose of the study is two fold: a) to examine, analyse and document the current approaches towards addressing the needs and interests of women, and b) drawing on lessons from recent experience, to produce practical recommendations and guidelines on hoe to maximise the effectiveness of UN and NGO programmes in reaching women and responding to their needs.

3 ISSUES TO BE COVERED

The man issues to be covered are related to the outreach, relevance and effectiveness of programmes affecting the female population in different parts of Afghanistan. The following questions will be relevant:

- To what extent do current programming approaches incorporate a gender perspective at the different stages of the project cycle, from planning in implementation, monitoring and evaluation?
- To what extend have different programmes been successful in finding creative solutions to circumvent local regulations and reach and benefit female members of local communities? How has this been achieved in different locations?
- What are the main obstacles in the successful implementation of programme related to women? To what extent can they be overcome or bypassed?
- What approaches have proven to be successful in addressing the needs and interests of women? What are the factors that have made these successes possible?
- What is the potential for setting up informal women's networks in the different localities or mobilising existing ones?
- What groups of people, male and female, could act as catalysts for change at the local level? How could these people be mobilised to help the UN and NGOs develop strong linkages with rural women?

Both quantitative and qualitative information on the above issues will need to be collected and analysed by the study team and relevant recommendation should be made.

4 METHODOLOGY

The study team will ultimately decide what methods to use for data collection and should pan their work accordingly from an early stage. The following are suggestions to e further considered:

Secondary sources (project documents, reports)
Individual interviews
Direct observation
Focus group discussions
Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires

Working groups on gender, wherever already established, will facilitate the data collection.

DETAILED ITINERARY OF STUDY TEAM

ISLAMABAD

09 - 23 June	Islamabad. Information resourcing, planning itinerary, designing data collection systems. Two-day bus trip to Jalalabad for expatriate's Afghanistan visa.

KHOST and GARDEZ, PAKTIA PROVINCE

24 June	Fly to Khost, arriving pm. Male staff focus group discussion.
25 June	Road travel to Gardez for rural project visits.
26 June	Rural project visits near Khost. Male Workshop.
27 June	Fly to Islamabad, arriving pm.
29 - 30 June	Islamabad. Methodology review.

JALALABAD, NANGARHAR PROVINCE and LAGHMAN PROVINCE

01 July	Fly to Jalalabad, arriving pm. Agency briefing; project identification.
02 July	Project document review; preparation of interview schedule; workshop planning and invitations.
03 July	Jalalabad + Sorkhrud project & agency visits.
04 July	Jalalabad project visits; government department meetings.
06 July	Laghman province project visits.
07 July	am Female Workshop; pm Male Workshop.

KABUL and ENVIRONS

08 July	Fly to Kabul, arriving 17.00 hrs.
09 July	Negotiated transport and office facilities.
10 July	ACBAR meeting; agency meeting; confirmed appointments and workshop arrangements.
11 July	Kabul project visits; women's associations meetings.
12 July	am Agency visit.
13 July	Kabul project visits; Deh Sabz community visit; workshop preparation.
14 July	am Mixed Workshop; pm project visits
15 July	Fly to Islamabad, arriving pm.
16 July	Islamabad.
17 - 23 July	Sick.
24 - 29 July	Islamabad. Preliminary analysis.

MAZAR-E-SHARIF, BALKH PROVINCE and JOWZJAN PROVINCE

30 July	Fly to Mazar-e-Sharif; UN agency briefing; inter-agency briefing meeting.
31 July	Support 1-day UNOPS/SCF Inter-agency Gender Training Workshop.
01 August	Mazar project visits.
02 August	Road travel to Dawlatabad; meetings with *Shura* and community women.
03 August	Road travel to Jowzjan Province, Agcha, for project visits. Road travel to Mazar.
04 August	Mazar and Deh Dadi project visits.
05 August	am Meetings with government departments, human rights agencies, women's council, members of judiciary. pm Mixed Workshop.
06 August	Mazar project visits; Annual Appeal inter-agency meeting.
07 August	Fly to Islamabad, arriving pm.
08 - 17 August	Islamabad/Peshawar.. Analysis; meetings with coordinating agencies, donors, NGOs; planning last field visits.

HERAT, CITY and PROVINCE

18 August	Fly to Herat - Afghanistan & UN public holiday. Negotiate accommodation.
19 August	Confirm visit schedule; UN inter-agency briefing.
20 August	Project visits in city, camps, and rural villages.
21 August	am Home-based project visits pm Female Workshop
22 August	am Male Workshop; pm NGO meetings
24 August	Meetings with NGO; local families; female professionals; bazaar visit.

KANDAHAR CITY

25 August	Fly to Kandahar, arriving noon. pm UN agency meeting; inter-agency briefing and planning schedule.
26 August	Visits to male health training, MCH clinic, ICRC female staff.
27 August	NGO visits, project visits.
28 August	am Home-based female health training, UN meetings pm Male Workshop.
29 August	am Female Workshop pm Road travel to Quetta.
30 August	Commercial flight to Islamabad.

31 August - 1 SeptemberRest days

ISLAMABAD

02 - 26 Sept.	Meetings; data analysis; report structuring; report writing.

STUDY QUESTIONNAIRES

Note: All questionnaires followed the same format. They were intended to address specific issues, on which information was sought through a series of questions. As stated in Chapter 1.2.2, these were used to guide discussion with women, rather than followed rigidly with visible pen and paper - which are always inhibiting.

1 HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE

A Issue: Do womenparticipate in project identification and planning?

1 Who had the idea to start a clinic/health education programme?
2 Who asked you to take part? Who did you talk to about this?
3 Was it a no. 1 choice of the people? Yes/No
4 Was it your no.1 choice? Yes/No
5 Why is the clinic/health training here, in this place?
6 Is there a better place for it to be?

B Issue: Do services meet with women's needs?

7 Which problems do you bring to the clinic/training course?
8 How does the clinic/training course solve them?
9 How else could you solve these problems, if you didn't come here?
10 What other problems would you like the clinic/training course to solve for you?
11 Are those problems more or less important? More/Less
Why?

C Issue: Are women encouraged to participate in implementation?
Eg by giving feedback, recommending changes, identifying different needs

12 What do you do about those other problems?
Do you talk to these people ('service providers') about them?
13 Who willyou talk to about them?

D Issue: How are decisions made to visit clinic/take part in training?

14 When do you come to the clinic?
How did you decide to join the training?
15 How do you decide to visit the clinic - for yourself? - for your children?

E Issue: Constraints on participation

16 What problems do you have in coming to the clinic/training?
Eg making decision to come
travel (transport/cost/guardian)
understanding staff/instructions
obtaining medicines/materials
remembering procedures
follow up

F Issue: Impact on women

17 How often do you come to the clinic? For yourself? For a child?
18 How has the clinic/training helped you? Give examples.
19 Who do you share this information with?
20 How can the clinic/training help you more?

G Issue: Impact on men

21 What do men do if they have health problems?

H Issue: Sustainability

22 Who provides the clinic/training?
23 For how long?
24 Do you think the clinic will continue after that? Yes/No.
Why (not)?
How? Who will be responsible for it?

2 INCOME GENERATION QUESTIONNAIRE

As HEALTH, with amendments as follows:

E Issue: What are limitations on women's control over activity?

17 How do you get your materials for your activity?
18 Where do they come from (i. Where bought)
Are they satisfactory to you?
19 Do you sell what you produce? Yes/No
How do you decide what price to sell at?
Who calculates this?
20 How do you actually get your product into the market? Who does this?
21 Does your product match with what people want? Hoe do you know this?
22 How can it be changed/improved to increase your sales?
23 Are there other ways you could earn some money? Give examples.
24 Are there other ways your family could earn some money? Give examples.
25 What other skills/resources (chances) do you / your family have that could be helpted?

F Issue: Impact on women

26 How does this activity help you? Give examples.
27 How much do you earn (specify if per item / per week/ per months).
How do you get this income? (ie who is bringing it to you)
Who do you do with this income?
Who makes the decisions about how to use the income?
28 How could you get more benefit from this activity?
29 Would you like more benefit? Give examples>
Why/How would this help you?
30 Who do you share the training with?

G Issue: Impact on men

31 Does your father/husband/brother work?
What do they think about your income?

3 NON-FORMAL EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

As HEALTH, with additional questions asked on what sort of education existed, or they wouldl ike, for their girls and boys.

EXAMPLE OF GENDER TOOL AND ITS USES:

Women's Empowerment and Equality Framework - **helps to identify level of women's development being addressed, and adapts to different aspects of programmes and projects**

Note: Although the 'WEEF' was developed specifically to address the development of women towards equality with men, it can also be used to analyse levels of Community empowerment or of Children's empowerment.

1 TO ANALYSE WOMEN'S GENDER ISSUES THROUGHOUT A PROJECT CYCLE

PROJECT STAGE	WELFARE	ACCESS	AWARENESS	MOBILISATION	CONTROL
BACKGROUND SITUATION					
POLICY POSITION					
PROBLEM					
INTERVENTION STRATEGY					
PROJECT GOAL	x	x			
OBJECTIVES	x	x			
IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY					
ACTIVITIES	x				
MONITORING INDICATORS					
EVALUATION					

As discussed in Chapter 3.1, gender issues are usually identified in Goals, Objectives and Activities, but are often not evident elsewhere. Gender issues should arise from the Situation Analysis and then be followed through all stages of the project cycle.

imposition in some areas of the country And as conflict continues in Afghanistan, so also may these present descriptions seem unfamiliar to a future reader.

2.1 SOCIAL ATTITUDES

In all regions visited the norm today - whether attributable to tradition, custom, or religion - is the seclusion of women, known as *purdah* (literally, 'curtain'[2]). This is the case in all rural areas visited, and in all urban areas although these in particular show a greater degree of variation on the accessibility of women. Aspects of seclusion which bear directly upon women's access to programmes include women's mobility, educational level, networking and, to satisfy the aspect that commands most popular interest, her form of external dress.

2.1.1 Limits on freedom of movement

Women's primary sphere of interest is the domestic one, where activities relate to the management of the household and care of the family. In gender terms, these can all be called 'reproductive' activities because they are connected to the well-being and continuity of the family. As gender analysts, we remain mindful that these tasks could be done by men, and in this respect they are different from women's reproductive role of child-bearing, which is exclusively hers because it is determined by her biological sex and cannot be undertaken by men.

Women may also look after household livestock as we saw in Gardez, or contribute labour to locally-sited agricultural activities as seen in Paktia province alongside their husbands. These tasks are often considered as part of a wife's usual household (reproductive) duties, and are therefore not recognised as an economic (productive) contribution even when the livestock or crop are produced for sale by her husband. However, there are also instances where women themselves rear animals for marketing - that is, as productive (income earning) activity. A woman will expect her husband (or some male relative) to sell the animals on her behalf - and she will not be expected to pay him for his labour.

Women's freedom of movement is generally confined to the geographical range of these domestic duties. As implied above, this range does not include marketing. As it is incumbent upon a man to be the breadwinner of his family (a religious duty and a matter of honour among the Pushtoon); it is men who 'go out to work' and deal with the outside world beyond the home. Thus there is no perceived need for a woman to go beyond her domestic sphere, and in order to do so she will need the permission of her male family members.

Because of patterns of marriage and inheritance, this means a woman is confined to an area bound by the homes of her husband's immediate male relatives, meaning father and brothers. A man and his sons usually live within one compound of self-contained family units, or a conglomerate of small closely linked households. If good relations are maintained with the extended family - husband's uncles and their sons (his cousins) - then she is able to visit the women of these families. Brothers may move into separate households as their sons in turn marry. In this way a traditional village will comprise a community of people related through men. In routine life, a woman's world is substantially defined by her experience within these family limits.

[2] This physical segregation of women is reinforced everywhere, from the locked compound gates or heavy door opened by a man or child and only exceptionally by a woman; by the sacking draped behind the gate to prevent a glimpse of what lies beyond; by the vocal announcement of a visiting male relative before entering to give time for the women to disappear from sight; by the hand-embroidered door hangings to deny vision between adjacent rooms; and by the *burkha* itself - all to prevent the prying eyes of men falling upon women in whom is invested the honour of men, the integrity of the family, and the continued purity of the tribe.

2 TO ASSESS IF A PROJECT IS ADDRESSING WOMEN'S GENDER ISSUES

LEVEL OF WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT	NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL	POSITIVE
CONTROL			
MOBILISATION			
AWARENESS			
ACCESS		x	
WELFARE		x	

Read project to see what levels of women's empowerment are being addressed. Rate as follows:
Negative: Project objectives do not mention gender issues, or contribute to a deterioration of women's development and women become worse off.
Neutral: Project objectives recognise gender issues, but level of concern means project does not worsen women's situation but also does not improve it..
Positive: Project objectives are concerned with gender issues to improve women's condition or position in relation to men .
Note: Project is usually finally rated according to its highest-rated objective.

3 TO ANALYSE WOMEN'S GENDER ISSUES IN PROJECT OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE	WELFARE	ACCESS	AWARENESS	MOBILISTION	CONTROL
Objective 1: To....		X			
Objective 2: To...					
Objective 3: To...	x				

4 TO ANALYSE WOMEN'S GENDER ISSUES IN A COUNTRY PROGRAMME

PROGRAM	PROJECTS	Welfare	Access	Aware-ness	Mobilisation	Control
WATER SUPPLY	Karez repair	x				
	Potable water supply	x				
FOOD SECURITY	Improved wheat seed					
	Fruit trees	x	x	x		
EDUCATION	Small business development					
WOMEN SPECIFIC	Sericulture - f.head households	x	x	x	x	x

Water collection is the only routine outside activity in which women can engage without permission from their menfolk. It is thus the only routine public activity which is accepted by society.

> *Sorkhrud, Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province.* A well integrated community. 'We meet in the evenings at the karez, where we talk freely and gossip. There is no objection from the men.'

> *Village near Khost, Paktia Province.* The rural community has been substantially disrupted by years of war, and now contains quite a lot of internally displaced families from Kabul. An older women laughingly explained that when women collect water, the last bucket always takes the longest to draw.

As is clear from what women tell us, water collection is not only a domestic activity. It is also an important opportunity to get out of their usual boundaries, and enjoy social exchange with others.

Non-routine activities which, if local, do not need male permission relate to religion or health - both ultimately connected with her reproductive role. Women may tend a grave, as seen in Khost; or very often are seeking help for successful conception, or the birth of a son instead of a daughter. These consultancies might be with a mullah; *hakim* (traditional doctor) as seen in the streets of Shahr-e-Nau in Kabul; possibly a *farbin* (fortune teller); or by way of blessings from a shrine. In urban areas, women without domestic facilities may also visit the *hamam*[3] (public baths), for purification following menstruation, intercourse, or as a social ritual before marriage. Women's 'ticket' to social acceptance on these independent outings is the company of a child, an older woman, or a group of female relatives.

The wider networks for women are major life events such as engagements, marriages, births, circumcisions, funerals. These provide opportunities for consolidating existing, as well as extending, family relationships, and to meet with more distant relatives who live in other villages. This accounts for the large numbers of guests, and particularly for the great excitement of women. For women such occasions are (relatively rare) opportunities for them to meet in large groups and exchange news and concerns, to eye up potential brides for their sons, and expound upon the virtues and merits of their daughters.

In urban areas women have increased opportunities to go out (although not all men will permit) because of the existence of large central and more local bazaars. In Herat women are seen everywhere in the bazaars - continuing their daily rounds of household duties or medical visits - wrapped in burkhas or chadar namaz. They move alone, with a child, or in small groups, but do only what is necessary and hasten home. In contrast virtually no women are seen in the central bazaars of Kandahar, Jalalabad, or of Khost.

These limits on women's independent movement are most rigidly imposed upon young women, single and also married without children, and generally apply to both rural and urban areas. Families who consider themselves to be socially climbing will also increasingly 'protect' their female members; this usually translates into greater restrictions on when and where women are permitted to go, and what they do. We encountered women in Jowzjan who very proudly told us that they no longer wove carpets; their family had greatly improved its economic status (partly with the product of their efforts!). They might usefully have taught their skills to poorer women, but this too would be beneath their newly acquired social position - as 'ladies of leisure'. With regard to ethnicity, the study saw more *consistent* restrictions among Pushtoon rural and urban communities, and rural Uzbek communities.

In towns and cities, some neighbourly relationships may be established between adjacent, non-related families, but these will observe codes of segregation between the sexes. And even among

[3] This has now been forbidden by Taliban authorities in Herat and Kabul.

the liberal minded families found in the five major cities, where women receive higher education and are permitted to work, this does not imply that these working women, or men, can mix freely with colleagues in off-duty hours, and certainly not in wider society. In private life, it is a rare family that does not observe segregation of visitors, including international, who are received in a room separated (or hastily vacated) from family activities. Foreign women are treated as honorary men, and it is only after trust is established that they will be introduced to the Afghan female family members.

Years of war have hardened attitudes. A Rural Rehabilitation Shura in Balkh retains bitter memories of the Soviet experience. When asked what they feared about agency support projects for women, one elder stated that 'they will take away (abduct) our women'. They were equally sensitive to any notion of women's rights, which are similarly associated with the Saur revolution[4]. Such reservations were not confined to men. Women in a meeting in Jowzjan expressed apprehension about the study team leader's nationality. Assuming her to be Russian on the basis of fair complexion, some of them withdrew their agreement to be involved with their own proposed women's group.

Although these concerns were most often verbalised in the northern regions visited (Pushtoon and Uzbek), the real or perceived desecration by the soviets of Afghanistan's women and what they represent survives in all parts of the country visited. Within such a historical context it becomes easier to understand both family concerns for, and the social criticisms levied at, women who work.

Rural settlement in urban areas, and vice versa, have created tensions and suspicions between perceived differences in values and lifestyles. The trend is to become more conservative. Communities have been physically and socially destroyed by years of conflict. Newly mixed communities are less trusting and until such time as mutual confidence is established, greater restrictions are imposed upon women. Villagers near Khost explained that in the past women walked to school with their children every day; now they scarcely leave the house as they are unsure who their neighbours are[5].

In Jalalabad, women displaced from Kabul said that their husbands discouraged their going out, in conformity with local conservative attitudes and concerns over women's security. Both men and women dislike this, but view such limitations as an expedient to maintain social acceptability, as well as to protect their personal security.

In Kandahar, displaced Kabuli women similarly felt vulnerable and rarely went out. They explained this as a prohibition on going outside by the local Taliban authority, rather than personal fears. In contrast the local women insisted that to go shopping was not a problem, but it was necessary to comply with the regulations to wear a *burkha*, and take a chaperone - a child. The different perceptions of the prevailing political restrictions reflects what each is accustomed to, and the fact that local women probably have an established (trading) relationship with the shopkeepers they visit.

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[4] The 1978 Saur revolution sought to improve women's rights in society by challenging traditional practices, which it considered to result from patriarchal and feudal ties between men and women. It prohibited bride price and limited dowries; it banned forced marriage and levirate; it introduced minimum ages for consent to marry to 16 years for females and 18 years for males. Widespread literacy programmes were expanded to provide basic reading and writing skills to all adults within a year. In subsequent years, numbers of young women (and men) were routinely sent to communist countries for education. Many returned with emancipated ideas which fit uneasily with traditional values; some married foreign husbands; a few acquired children out of wedlock; others failed to return altogether.

[5] This may be in the literal sense in that urban displaced may have moved back (often after several generations) to their rural roots. It can also be metaphorical in that the neighbouring family has also returned but over years each his pursued different political interests - actively or otherwise - and trust no longer exists between them.

In all cities of the country, working women, particularly those employed by foreign agencies, are subjected to continuous scrutiny and, very often, to negative attitudes. A woman is judged on the basis of her personal appearance, and who she works with. While the urban areas have, over time, accepted women working within the education and health sectors, there have been relatively few opportunities for women, or men, to develop any clear concept of 'office work'. This is outside the home, an unaccompanied activity often undertaken alongside men, may involve travel - and it is not a clinic or school. So many challenges together must be difficult for a traditional society to accept. As most Afghan women tend to dress well to go to work - and dressing up among more conservative families is reserved only for special (female only) occasions and husbands (see Footnote 1) - this becomes a focus of attention - and ultimately the subject of comment and control.

> ***Many women resist.*** They defiantly wear bright colours, make up, western style clothes, and in Kabul shalwars have almost become mid-calf rather than the usual ankle length. Women in Herat, returnees from Iran, can be seen walking, black chadars billowing in the wind, exposing black clad kneecaps in their short black skirts. Can 'legs' be becoming fashionable in Afghanistan? In the busiest street in Herat we are greeted by a crowd of adolescent girls, smiling and laughing as they grip their dark navy, brown or black printed chadars under their chins, and provocatively display their hands - each nail vividly painted differently, with bands of coloured design trailing up the fingers and hands. This was, once upon a time, the symbol of dancing girls in Herat. In an Uzbek village in Jowzjan, an indignant father tells us he doesn't want his daughters to look like the two female health trainers we are accompanying. They are in mournful hejabs and chadar namaz, without a lick of paint on their young serious faces.

Social attitudes, particularly of men, in all parts of the country would very likely condemn all of these as loose women, rather than seeing them as women adjusting to new situations, or expressing themselves in commitment to work, to protest, or even to cynicism against what they see as men and mullahs trivialising the wider context of death and destruction. While the men of Herat formally objected to the Taliban demand that they adopt beards, they did nothing to support their sisters when required to adopt the *burkha*. Nor did they support the women's demonstration to the governor protesting against the withdrawal of access to education for girls. It was a women's organisation in Kabul that protested the denial of rights by the Taliban to her sisters at the opposite end of the country in Herat.. Not a man - not even a relative of the participants - was seen to support any of these protests

Key points: Limits on freedom of movement

- Segregation between women and men is a widely accepted social behaviour, and manifests itself in some form in all levels of society - both rural and urban.
- Women's 'proper place' is inside, within the domestic domain where her responsibilities relate to the reproduction, continuity and well-being of the family and ultimately the tribe. Her most routine external activity is water collection, which serves as a much-appreciated social activity. Men's proper place is outside, within the public domain where his responsibilities relate to production (economic survival), and community relations (social survival) of the extended family and ultimately the tribe.
- Female interests which take women beyond their routine domestic domain need permission and guardianship of men.
- Greatest restrictions seem to be imposed upon young women, single and married without children; the socially mobile; and beyond these categories, possibly [6]among the Pushtoon and rural Uzbek peoples.
- The social composition and cohesion of a community impacts upon female participation in projects. Best opportunities for involving women are in communities which have retained, or achieved, social cohesion.
- Generally, social disruption by conflict or influx of displaced families, creates tensions, increases female 'protection', and leads to resistance to women's participation.

[6] This statement is based upon observations made during the study tour, but do not represent any systematic analysis of ethnicity and women's programming opportunities.

- Any small-scale home-based project in a rural area is likely to benefit closely related women, unless there is broad-based beneficiary selection based on good community knowledge and good community relations.
- Working women have crossed the social boundaries for women and are therefore subject to suspicion and scrutiny by more conservative society.
- Professional relationships between women and men do not imply free social interaction in private life
- Social attitudes are a powerful force throughout Afghanistan; it is a rare man who will individually challenge them even if his personal belief differs.
- Many men working in aid agencies themselves hold conservative values, and do not necessarily believe in, or themselves privately practice, gender equity. This can create tensions both in commitment to agency objectives, and in relationships with female colleagues.

2.1.2 Limited education

Female literacy levels in Afghanistan are among the lowest in the world; while reported in 1992 to be no more than 13%, they are now believed to be as low as 4%[7]. Where education has existed in the past, it did not reach far into rural areas for women. Girls learn their future roles as wives and mothers from a very early age at home; fathers rarely see need for them to be educated and mothers often are unwilling to relinquish their valuable assistance.

Urban opportunities for education were not necessarily taken up by girls. In Mazar-i-Sharif itself, between one quarter and one third of tailoring/literacy courses visited within the city were attended by young women aged between 14 and around 20 years. Many trainees explained that their parents had not, in earlier years, thought school necessary for a girl.

Early marriages mean that many girls do not complete secondary education, which reduces present-day opportunity for adequately skilled female resources. In Jalalabad few females were reported to have continued to secondary education (at 13 years), although in the city many girls now attend primary and middle school. A young woman explained that out of her class of almost forty students, only ten continued to secondary level, and five to university of whom only two graduated. Early marriage was similarly reported in Herat, where we were told that even urban women have traditionally married by the time they reach eighth class (around 15 years). This pattern, according to female informants, is now increasing and at even earlier ages, because marriage is the only option for young women who are denied education. The massive exodus of Kabulis has left the poorest, and hence the least educated, behind in the capital. One agency had experienced difficulty in identifying only two qualified women per district to implement its community health programme.

Such low literacy impacts upon female programmes which target the poorest who are often the uneducated. Almost all income generating projects have had to add literacy - and the better ones, also numeracy - to enable trainees record simple measurements and write customer names. A rural programme in animal husbandry had to completely revise its training concept as they had set their (already modest) standards too high.

> *The times we do literacy are the most tiring... we have to work so hard at it. Making the macaroni is easy.*
>
> [Balkh Province, Qamaz IDP Camp: women of macaroni project]

From the study team's observations of many training programmes, one key factor limiting their success if evaluated (as opposed to having success measured in terms only of numbers trained), would be that training materials and content are not pitched at a level appropriate to the beneficiaries' understanding.

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[7] Table A2.1, *Human Development Report 1995*, United Nationals Development Progrmme, New York/Oxford, Oxford 1995.

Key points: Limited education

- Female literacy believed to be as low as 4%; historically education has never reached distant rural areas..
- Because of widespread lack or low levels of education, any training for women needs special consideration in terms of content, process, time, and assessment of achievement.. Instructional materials for women need to be very simple, clear, contextually relevant, and make greater use of visual resources[8]. Learning times need to be realistic, and generally longer than at present.
- Trainers need skills appropriate to adult, non-literate, non-formal contexts - participative methods, and continuous learning assessment have not routinely been part of any educational training they may have had. Many of today's 'teachers' are not formal graduates of dedicated training.

2.1.3 Rural and urban networks

Two categories of informal networks need to be identified to develop women's involvement in assistance programmes: one is needed to reach women as beneficiaries with special emphasis on rural areas, the other is to find women as workers. In all rural areas, first contact must be made with the influential men of the community, and their permission sought to meet with women. Only women will be permitted to meet with women. Once this is agreed, then there are network opportunities.

Within the village, there are three potential sources of influence among women, who also usually have the approval and respect of men. First are those women who derive status from powerful men, the wives or older close female relatives of the mullah, *malik*, *arbab* (both terms denoting local leadership), elder or shura member. These can be pivotal in reaching other women, and sometimes in turn in influencing the men themselves. This depends upon individual family relationships, and is not predictable. In a remote village in Balkh Province, it was the young wife of the commander who persuaded him that the village needed water, a health centre, and finally a school for girls plus boys.

A second category of women gain status, and influence, from religious duties. These can include traditional birth attendants[9], or Q'ranic teachers (often older respected women), both of whom have opportunities to visit a wider group of families beyond her own immediate kin. Their range of contact will depend upon their numbers per community, as well as positive social relationships.

A third category of influential women is the educated few - health workers, or teachers whose influence derives from their assumed knowledge, rather than on their actual learning. They too can be helpful in mobilising female networks. This category can also include educated urban visitors to village communities who are highly regarded as knowledgeable of the world beyond the village, and a potential source of influence provided they retain genuine interest in and empathy with their rural relatives. Their influence is enhanced if their rural relative happens to be part of the village leadership.

Between villages: As discussed in 2.1.1, within a conservative community female network opportunities are limited and essentially include women within the extended family. Beyond this,

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[8] This becomes increasingly difficult to do in the many areas under control of Taliban, where the depiction of all living things is forbidden. In rural areas beyond their political presence, it does not seem to be a problem.

[9] The support of women during delivery of a new life is usually taken up by a woman to enhance her own religious merit in the afterlife, and not for worldly gain. For this reason, formalised payment of a traditional birth attendant is not expected or relevant - even when it is highly desirable. Her status - and 'market' for her services - increases in relation to the number of successful births, as well as her publicly observed conduct.

are the contacts maintained by a women with her natal family - subject to the approval of her husband. This network can provide introductions to other communities and villages which might be used to extend projects, or to enable and use women to extend their new skills or knowledge from one community to their sisters and sister-sin-law in another community. This requires close relations with individuals, and is realistic only within a sound community programme where trusted relationships are established with female staff , and with the male relatives of the women in question.

Within urban areas: In towns or cities, informal networks of women may be developed through health centres, schools (via their children), or by making contact with educated women within academic departments, judiciary, senior officers of government offices (social affairs, literacy and education, health, agriculture), press or media agencies, and staff already working within agencies.

Urban to rural: These linkages are possible through staff in aid agencies as well as government offices, where locally resident working men and women maintain close connections with their rural family members. As indicated above, their education confers status which can command respect from rural communities provided linkages are sincere. While men may be able to make initial introductions to rural community leadership, female staff can provide vital linkages beyond leadership directly to women.

Networks to female staff: Almost all urban working women maintain contact with their former high school and college friends, and remain abreast of their respective professional development. A summary sheet of what is required of the job, and its rewards in terms of skills, experience, education, travel, location, duration of contract, and indication of level of salary and other remuneration can usefully be circulated both locally through female urban networks and agency staff of both sexes.

Women now denied the right to work in their government posts (as in Herat or Kandahar) are often keen to take up new work opportunities to replace the income which they no longer receive (although they may remain on the government pay-roll, and their employment may contravene agency policies). Some will be known to aid agencies, or to female staff of aid agencies.

Poverty will sometimes encourage a family - or part of it - to relocate wherever there is chance of good employment, including inside Afghanistan. Today many families depend upon their professional women to become the main breadwinners. It is also worth considering circulating needs and opportunities among regional offices of key agencies with female staff. This needs inter-agency cooperation, including for initial vetting of possible candidates, and is yet an idea waiting to be realised.

Respect for facilitators of linkages: Most individuals who are personally approached are accommodating with introductions ,if time is given to fully explain the agency objectives, the reason for enquiry, the mode of operation , and sensitivity to cultural constraints and women's situation. All this is unlikely to be achieved in a single meeting; trust must be also established at this level before anyone is going to risk her status and relations with a community or colleague by introducing in insincere stranger.

Inevitably such networks carry the risk of personal friendships being placed before relevant skills and quality; these are issues which the agency must assume responsibility for checking.

Key points: Rural and urban networks

- In terms of programming, the process of an agency accessing and networking with women is best achieved by female professionals who belong to the local area. They can make links from their own urban bases to local urban or rural communities.
- Professional women are found in aid agencies, health centres, judiciary, present or former government departments of health/education/non-formal education/rural rehabilitation. In regions where they are not allowed to work, they may be contacted via agency men's personal networks.
- Linkages are usually made via personal relations with family or professional peers. These relationships need to be respected.
- Trust, and time to establish it, are essential to develop female networks.
- Within communities, including rural, women's informal networks may be developed by women with status gained from powerful husbands/brothers/fathers, from religious acts (birth attendant/religious teacher), or from learning (health worker/teacher).
- Networks between rural communities can be made via women's natal families if agency trust is established.

2.1.4 External dress: tradition, fashion and political 'meat'

The seclusion of women customarily requires that women dress modestly by covering their heads, and among the more conservative, by concealing their body shape when out of doors - particularly as a young woman. Women's external dress is a mixture of tradition, of religious interpretations, of political history, and of fashion. What is reported here is what was found among communities visited today and, with the exception of possible new edicts from political authorities which can change how urban women dress, what may be expected by project staff within the forthcoming phases of programme planning. Its impact upon programming is at several levels: first it creates barriers of communication (it takes some time for an outsider to become accustomed to talking to an 'invisible' woman); second it can create tensions for the wearer which can range from discomfort (particularly in hot weather) to feelings of suffocation or even physical risk for those not accustomed to total cover; and third it may influence how the female project staff should themselves dress in order to carry out their duties.

In all areas visited, the most common forms of outer dress observed were the *burkha* or *chadar namaz* (a large shawl, about the size of a single bed sheet, worn over the head, shoulders and draping over the full body. Although older women will wear the *chadar namaz* open-faced, younger women are expected to pull it well over the forehead, and up over the face to conceal all except the eyes. The smaller version, covering down to hip level is called a *chadar*). These are commonplace throughout rural areas in all regions visited in accordance with social and family values, rather than political demand.

The *burkha* is worn by a surprisingly high number of urban women even within the more liberal cities of Mazar and Kabul. This reflects the fact that not all families relinquished this aspect of *purdah,* even if they adopted more 'modern' attitudes to female education, or female employment. These values continue as social norms and family preferences, including among a high proportion of men working within the UN agencies.

This is not necessarily what women did in the past, but it is what they believe is appropriate or necessary in their social milieu today. A female judge in Mazar very strongly made this point: as she pulled out her *burkha* to return from the city centre to her home some 20 minutes away:

> *What is important is my work, and if I have to wear a burkha to keep my community happy, then that is what I do. I don't like it but my work can go on.*

1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Charter of the United Nations and its many related covenants and declarations affirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity of the human person, and in the equal rights of women and men. Human rights instruments have increasingly addressed the protection of women and girls from discriminatory practices. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) - uniquely among human rights instruments - obligates states to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organisation or enterprise which may seek to restrict women, irrespective of their marital status, from equal opportunity with men to take full part in political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognises the particular needs for special care and protection of children. While emphasising the primary caring and protective responsibility of the family, it also reaffirms the need for state protection before and after birth, and calls for respect and protection of the rights of each child without any discrimination on the basis, among others, of sex, religion, or ethnicity, . The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995, recognised that the achievement of equality, development, and peace can only be realised with women and men having equal access to power and decision making; towards this goal governments committed themselves to the further advancement and empowerment of women all over the world .

In the implementation of their assistance programmes and projects, United National agencies are expected to stand by these mandates. That those working in Afghanistan acknowledge this, as a matter of principle, is reaffirmed in an internal document of 26 March 1996 on 'United National Operational Strategy on Gender Issues in Afghanistan', even where states, governments, or groups beyond the control of recognised governments, legally prescribe or otherwise sponsor discriminatory measures against women. The United Nations agencies' policy position in Afghanistan is confirmed, and had already been applied in November 1995 when UNICEF withdrew its support to education in those areas of Afghanistan where political authorities had banned school attendance by all girls.

Afghanistan is a member state of the United Nations and has been party to a number of its charters and covenants. It had signed the CRC, and ratified it in 1994 with qualifications concerning possible conflict with Islamic Shariah principles, and had been a signatory party in 1990 to the CEDAW which has not been ratified. Afghanistan was not officially represented at Beijing (although a small number of Afghan women attended). Its government denied permission to its planned representation at the eleventh hour on grounds that some of the topics were inappropriate to Islamic values. This late action typifies a pattern of unpredictable government attitude towards women which persists in the capital today (see Chapter 2.3.2).

Historically government support for women in Afghanistan has never been certain; steps forward appear always to have been followed by steps backward. Early official efforts to improve the status of women were made by Amanullah Khan in the 1920s. These included the establishment of the first girls' primary schools, granted rights for men and women to choose their own marriage partners, encouraged women to establish their own women's associations, banished wearing of the veil, and required both sexes to adopt western dress. His successors immediately withdrew all such reforms, and reintroduced strict 'Islamic' law which reinforced women's position within the home.

While the freedoms of individuals are not to be ignored, professional women at work within this social context clearly are having to make choices. With the prevailing restrictions and impositions - not only from political parties as the judge pointed out - the struggle is harder and it cannot be fought and won overnight. It will take more time to influence, and even longer to change, the segregation which is rooted deep within Afghan society and which often extends to her making herself 'invisible' once outside the domestic area. As the judge obviously felt, perhaps a more appropriate strategy to change is for women to demonstrate, to themselves and others, that they are able to make a difference. Dress becomes an issue of a lower order.

Some ethnic groups have different forms of dress which seem restrictive in other ways. The tall, ornately decorated head dress of the Uzbek, which is arranged to cover the face of a bride, may expose her face in later years, but can never be removed in the presence of men or mother-in-law. Even when sleeping, its removal requires her husband's permission, and it constantly necessitates a woman to bend low to pass through doorways. Among many Uzbek women, these are considered to be old-fashioned, and in some cases are being abandoned in favour of the more 'modern' *chadar namaz* .

> *We started this new design (i.e. the chadar namaz) when we lived in Peshawar...*
>
> [Uzbek village near Aqcha, Jowzjan Province: a very 'modern' woman]

A woman in her mid-forties, attending a literacy class, vividly explained how she felt that a *burkha* contributed to personality formation. As a shield from the outside world it inhibited interaction and thus confidence to deal with the world. It similarly resulted in a lack of coordinated action so that a woman did not walk well. In *hejab*, she explained, a woman gained confidence because she had freedom of movement and, having to face the world and able to interact more fully in it, she leaned to walk through it with confidence, and knew how to do things. She concluded by saying that she thought it impossible to change from one to the other at her age; already her character was established and she could not adjust her style of walking, far less her way of thinking. Everyone would know she had come from a *burkha* background. Similarly, someone turning to a *burkha* from *hejab* could not lose enough of herself to make the necessary physical and mental adjustment - she could not feel comfortable, and would also be spotted.

The use of some form of *hejab* (a full-length coat -like garment) and chadar is relatively recent, being adopted from the middle east. For some women it is a fashionable alternative to the *burkha*; the uneducated young women of Mazar City were desperate to abandon the *burkha* and wear a *hejab* which they saw as a far more sophisticated fashion.

Hejab is now widely worn by working women as a more manageable outer garment in Kabul, Mazar, and Jalalabad. It is very rare in rural areas where their supposed 'backwardness' remains epitomised in the *burkha* - particularly for younger women. Older rural women will often only wear a *chadar* when moving around within the village.

Within Kabul it is strikingly noticeable that *hejab* is almost exclusively adopted by the various women's associations, although it has never been possible to ascertain if this is by 'contagious' choice of the women, or a requirement of the political parties by which most are supported. Within the city large numbers of young women sport nothing more than a small chiffon scarf perched prettily on their carefully coiffured hair.

Women's dress has become a contentious issue. Almost all political parties are promoting some version of it as being the appropriate Islamic cover for a woman; almost all outsiders focus on it as representing a major infringement of women's rights. A look at what political authorities are demanding is worthwhile.

The Taliban in Herat demand that women are covered from head to toe when out of doors; but they leave choice to women as to how she achieves this. Many women now wear the *burkha;* many others , returnees from Iran, adopt the Iranian *chadar namaz* (the shawl is worn like a cloak from head to foot, secured only at the neck) pulled well over the forehead and secured under the chin, but otherwise leaving the face exposed. Women's choice - or men's choice since it is up the cloth merchants - includes solid black, or currently dark muted prints.

The Taliban in Kandahar - both Movement and province being dominantly Pushtoon - demand that women wear *burkha.* This is customarily worn by the majority of women in this region. Now it is obligatory, and particularly affects internally displaced women from Kabul, the liberal few who had abandonned it, and all employed women at work inside their clinics and hospitals who are from time to time 'inspected' by the religious authorities. For some professional women, such as a prosthetist at work on machinery molding an artificial limb, it can present real risk of accident.. The female population are shuttlecocks, both outside where they are rarely seen, and inside health services - perhaps apt symbols of their intended status as objects of exchange in games played between men.

The Taliban in Paktia demand a male escort, work from home and not from office, and *burkhas* which are customarily worn by younger women. Older women, however, continue to wear their black *chadar namaz*, faces exposed, whether grazing their cattle, working in the fields beside their menfolk, or as seen walking along a river bank, perhaps making a family visit to a neighbouring village. Virtually no woman is seen in the main town bazaars. In this region, the impact of political rules on dress is scarcely noticeable. It does affect the very few women working with international agencies who now continue their work, no longer (officially) visiting their offices, accompanied by a male relative, and wear a *burkha.* Like the judge in Mazar, they do not like this but feel that such compromises are secondary to their personal fulfilment in using professional skills, in making a contribution to their people, and in meeting family economic needs.

The Nangarhar Shura, in Jalalabad, has periodically demanded that women be properly covered, usually as a result of political comment from the Taliban on their non-Islamic values, or of perceived threat from the more liberal attitudes of the large number of Kabul displaced people. Although women in this area would customarily adopt the *burkha* or a white *chadar namaz*, government departments have directed their staff, and schools, to wear black *hejab* and *chadar.* That this choice might have been a thoughtful concession to increased freedom of movement for working women is diminished by the requirement, at least in the education department, that working women cover their faces when summoned to a meeting with their male bosses.

In Kabul, the arrival of the new prime minister Hekmatyar made women's external dress a priority political concern, and the authorities announced the black *hejab* and *chadar,* without makeup, as the proper Islamic choice for women working in offices. As stated earlier, this is already adopted by Kabul's various women's associations, while women in aid agencies -and the wider public - adopt a wide variety of self-expression. The major risk to women not being covered in Kabul is that they will attract the attention of some lusty commander, and be hi-jacked for sexual exploitation, often by means of an enforced 'marriage'.

Key points: External dress - tradition, fashion, and political 'meat'

- With the exception of the north, all government authorities, not only the Taliban, have imposed some form of dress code on women. This is a repetition of history, and not a new phenomenon.
- Looked at in the wider context of Afghanistan, from the regions visited during this study, the principles - not necessarily the form - of external dress that have been dictated are little more than the customs that exist for the majority of women. In rural areas, and among conservative urban women it is one more layer of influence, but in reality does not change their usual behaviour.

- It is a backward step for the relatively few, progressive women of major cities. For many of these women It is extremely difficult to adjust to, giving rise to physical and psychological suffering and in some cases, trauma. It inhibits their daily routines, and can be a new work hazard.
- Many young urban women see their outer dress as a fashion choice - an attitude which is anathema to the ultra-conservative who view it as a religious requirement.
- Adaptation of external dress to the prevailing norms of society or politics is a strategy already adopted by some professional women who see this as secondary to achieving professional fulfilment. Since a working woman is still vulnerable to social disapproval and misjudgement of character, this sacrifice of personal preference may be both a practical protection and an opportunity to demonstrate what women can achieve.
- Afghan women themselves must make these decisions, but discussion of dress codes, as a form of non-verbal communication, needs to be part of every agency's field-work staff training.

2.2 FAMILY INFLUENCES

While societies may mould public behaviour and attitudes, there is always room within a family for different thought and action. Talks with women offered an opportunity to find out about how decisions are made in the home as opposed to what is said outside - in particular on taking part in projects, and what happens to income that a woman gains from project training.

2.2.1 Women as supporters

Most women hear about projects through female networks. In urban areas this is sometimes a younger sister who spotted a notice (on project office doors) on her way to or from school. For many, word is passed by more distant female relatives, neighbours, or school-day peers. In turn, their sources of information include female project staff with community contacts, women from government offices, or their menfolk who hear from a *malik* or *shura* member.

Most women interviewed said that they talk about their proposed activity first with other female family members; mother or mother-in-law are significant figures for younger women who need to agree new timings or delegation of household duties. While mothers seem to be very accommodating, no-one indicated that they carry special influence over fathers. As witnessed in Aqcha, Jowzjan Province, even if mother wants to attend a course herself together with her daughter, father's opinion is final - and in that particular case, negative.

Within the extended family women are ultimately each other's routine counsellors, and for this they need to maintain good relations. They say they talk a lot about their daily pressures - economic hardship, and hopes for peace. They will share medical concerns and coordinate necessary visits for treatment; they will give food support, no matter how small, to others with less than themselves. But there is limited trust; the also say they share selectively.

> *Who else can we talk to? We talk to all the women in the family.. there are plenty of us. But we never tell everything to any one woman. You don't know who you can trust.* [Rural village woman, near Gardez, Paktia Province.]

> *Oh yes, we talk about everything. We fight a lot, but it's not serious. We end up as good friends. We have to, there isn't anybody else.* [Woman of Tara village, Deh Sabz, Kabul.]

Women's relationships may at times be strained, but ultimately they have to be allies, rather than enemies. If women within a household have a shared concern, they adopt a collective strategy - a battery of pleadings having more impact than a solo voice. Each woman talks with her husband who discusses with his brothers and father. The men make a decision, and each informs his own wife.

The significant role that women play for each other was quickly noted by the study team when talking to groups of women. They quite openly and surprisingly readily share their problems, as if they feel that burdens reduce in proportion to the breadth of their solicitations and sympathies from others. This was especially noticeable within cohesive communities, and a core factor in widows' projects.

Widows openly stated that the key benefit is not the acquired skill or even the food contribution, but the opportunity the project provides for sharing concerns with others in the same situation. In effect, the project acts as a form of group therapy. This conclusion has also been reached, and checked by fairly systematic testing, by a Kabul NGO which has worked continuously for three years with a considerable number of widows.

Key points: Women as supporters

- Women are routinely both physically and emotionally isolated from all but a small group of female supporters within the immediate family.
- Women do not trust each other totally, but generally aim to be allies. They act collectively to influence men.
- Women seek solace or affirmation of their personal views by sharing in a large group when the opportunity arises. This group therapy not only consolidates social relations, but seems to build individual confidence.
- For many women, project participation fulfils this need for group interaction.
- Widows in particular gain unanticipated benefits from group-based projects; this opportunity to support them to redefine and gain confidence in their new social roles needs to be recognised.

2.2.2 Men as controllers

Men are the dominant influence over lives of women. The nature of this influence varies from family to family, and is not predictable. It can mean formal permission which is essential for a woman's action, whether it is project participation or a family visit. It can also mean no more than courteously sought consent to a decision already taken by the women - relatively rare and usually an older married woman. It certainly includes permission to participate in projects, but as seen above, women's networks within the family are used to influence men, who vary in their dominance.

It's not a problem for us... our men aren't the moody sort. [Tara Khel, Deh Sabz, Kabul: mature woman.]

Almost all women encountered, even elderly women, seek permission from their husbands or fathers concerning any activities outside the home. The only exceptions are her routine reproductive tasks, including water collection and health visits (if they do not involve travel or cost). A husband takes precedence over mother-in-law, and usually over father-in-law, although he and brothers will most often have been consulted on any major issue.

For many women, it seems inconceivable that things might be otherwise. In exploring the possibility of freedom of choice, say to make a necessary medical visit to a nearby town without difficulties of transport, the women in a village near Gardez replaced the absence of husband's control with social control. Their great fear of freedom was not violence from men, or 'other world' spirits or ginns, but 'what people might say'. For rural and conservative women, it is not easy even to think about moving beyond the social value system.

Key point: Men as controllers

- With very rare exceptions, a woman's participation in any activity which takes her beyond her usual household responsibilities - including assistance projects - is contingent upon permission of her husband or father, irrespective of her age.

2.2.3 Women with some autonomy

In total only a few women, in special circumstances, claimed to be independent decision makers. These included all unsupported widows, and small numbers of old widows, of supported widows in rural areas, and mature women married to older, sick husbands.

For unsupported widows, their lack of family can ameliorate social criticisms and grant them greater freedom of mobility. In particular, because of the economic burden they represent, it becomes more acceptable for them to work in order to feed their children. They are the only category of women who are broadly acknowledged by Afghanistan's various regional authorities as a priority for aid.

An exception is Kandahar where, it has been reported, a senior official claimed that within Islam all women were provided for. He failed to address the realities of the substantial number of unsupported widows in urban areas. Kabul, no doubt not his present concern under a different political group, claims to have around 50,000 widows who struggle alone to feed a quarter of a million children. The sheer impossibility of the task and the immediate need for survival means that many children, boys and girls, spend their days on the streets - working, scavenging, or begging for mere sustenance. A few end up in city 'orphanages' where, according to journalist reports, girls are secluded to the point where they are denied access even to outdoor daylight and fresh air. The magnitude of this problem is new to Afghanistan, and is only just beginning to be addressed by aid agencies.

Although the dilemma of unsupported widows is generally acknowledged, at the same time they are subjected to greater scrutiny by society and political groups in terms of their moral behaviour. Any display of perceived flamboyant behaviour - which may be nothing more than asking a direction - can bring accusations of improper conduct. Thus increased freedoms bring increased social pressures.

While many widows enjoy their independence, for others it is a burden and they suffer from a sense of isolation, and lack of support. The age of children is an important factor in this respect. Widows with older boys just entering their teen years, share discussions on major issues with them. Although decision making remains with mother, the son assumes responsibility as the public representative of his family in the wider community. This process will start very early - a boy of around seven years undertook the marketing of eggs obtained from his mother's poultry.

Old widows were strongly represented among project beneficiaries. Their very participation in projects is a major indicator of social change. Historically it would have been a great shame for any son to allow his old mother to publicly earn her food; nor would her pride have allowed her to admit to his lack of providing her with subsistence support. Poverty for some grasps every opportunity.

While some elderly widows bore their new predicament with the quiet dignity of acceptance; others were deeply distressed by the degree of social change brought about by years on conflict. The majority of these old women appeared emotionally and physically capable of no more than welfare assistance; skills acquisition was beyond their interest or capacities. But food aid was probably their only hope for physical survival among the poverty stricken families where they would receive, and take, the last and the least of the bread and the tea.

Younger widows, living jointly with extended family members - which was more commonly found in rural areas, claimed to make decisions independently. The economic pressures within the family meant that such women are not discouraged from accepting chances to earn home based income. This enables them minimally to cover essential food and clothing for themselves and their children, and thus relieving the economic burden on in-laws or brothers. Some managed to do more. Near

Gardez two such widows spent their earnings from poultry and egg sales first on child costs, and then on their own medical treatment[10]. One also invested some money in materials to support her and her sisters' additional income sources from self-taught skills - embroidery , and to assist with food costs for her elderly in-laws, including a disabled father-in-law.

The autonomy of mature women with old or sick husbands is discussed below.

Key points: Women with some autonomy

- Unsupported widows are independent decision makers, but view this autonomy variously. Most appear to welcome an opportunity to share ideas and experiences with other widows; they are subject to closer scrutiny by wider society which clearly inhibits (already constrained) individual choice.
- Widows in particular gain emotional and psychological benefit from group projects. Exchange with others appears to build their confidence and decision-making capacity, and to shape individual ideas and actions. For women who are socialised to be dependent upon men, aid projects can offer an opportunity for essential personal growth and solidarity. Additional time and resource supports for this process could usefully be included ; considerations of continuity need to be added.
- Economic constraints within families are changing patterns of decision making. Where men are under extreme pressure to meet the basic needs of widowed dependants, the woman has greater autonomy.
- Among supported widows (ie living with male relative), at least the younger ones seem to have control over their own income but for support of themselves and children. This has potential to improve both their condition and status.
- The presence of elderly widows among beneficiaries is an indicator of negative social change arising from extreme poverty. They find both social and emotional adjustment extremely painful. Their participation in projects is for the material benefits (food aid) and may be their only claim to a share in limited food at home. Thus project participation is key to their physical survival; skills training is probably superfluous.

2.2.4 Decisions on women's earnings from aid support

This section considers income earned by women from skills or training acquired from aid projects. It does not represent a comprehensive study of women's control over all sources of income. While at least some women with property and business incomes (managed by men) appear to have independent rights over how they use that income, women working in agencies have said their are restricted (whether explicitly or implicitly is not clear) on giving financial support to their own natal family, having first to meet the needs of a husband's parents and brothers. It may be that there are differences between decisions and ownership relating to regular and fixed salaries, than to income resulting from uncertain markets.

Income earned by a woman from her own home-based labours appears to belong to her. She is the decision maker on when and how it will be used even if, as in the case of the two widows cited above, they are provided shelter by male relatives. In providing skills training for income generation to vulnerable women, this is what we would hope for. But we would also hope that she herself personally gained from her earned income by improving her condition and her status, and in a sustainable way. These aspects are not so much in evidence[11].

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[10] In both cases the medical treatment described suggested at least an element of psychosomatic stress.

[11] Agency women were not systematically questioned on this issue since they were not the key target of the study. Anecdotal information suggests that while many have greater influence over how their earnings are spent, unmarried women seem to have greater autonomy but voluntarily give some, if not all, of their income to their mothers for household needs. Married women indicated that they feel unable to freely spend their earnings for their own natal families, though are fully expected to contribute to those of their husband's family.

Generally aid agencies think of income needed in terms of meeting basic needs of food, shelter, clothing. Data collected on this study aptly illustrates that this is too narrow a definition of need which, if aid is to bring women into development, has to consider women's social status as well as her physical condition relative to men.

Case Study on nature of benefit: Battered woman, village near Gardez, Paktia province.

A young woman had been accepted into her uncle's house because she was a victim of severe physical abuse from her husband (believed to be mental). Although the family said they could feed her, they could or would not provide other essentials such as clothing. The woman claimed that income earned from bead work, sold to women within the village, was used to buy her own bangles, eye kohl, and lastly clothing.

Commentary

Although some of these items superficially seemed like luxuries, they need to be viewed in the context of very traditional rural society. Bangles and eye kohl are status indicators of such young women. In order to be acceptable and accepted within the family and female community which had given her refuge, she needed to be able to compete with her peer group. Thus the benefit she received enhanced her status rather than her condition. This in itself is important, but it is not at all clear how this in itself is going to give the girl greater credibility in the eyes of her male relatives - who very likely see such purchases as female frippery. Her income earning capacity needs to be increased to alleviate her continued dependency - so that she is seen as an asset rather than a liability, and can then gain a greater share of decision making about her own life.

Unlike the women with some family support, the internally displaced women in Jalalabad and Mazar, and widows in Kabul, all claimed that their total income was spent on food alone, and at subsistence level only. At least half of these groups of widows had between four and six children to support. While their income is making some difference, its sustainability beyond the completion of projects was very much in question. Thus for the majority, they were gaining a small respite in condition from a future of slow starvation. Decision-making on income earned needed no consideration; 'how to eat after this?' was the key issue being discussed among these women.

If a husband takes money from his wife, in principle he should pay it back. Since it is a matter of honour that a man provides for his family, a loan usually is repaid in due course. But this assumes that a man has income. Practice differs because of generalised economic hardship within almost all families. In many cases women are the only, or the major, wage earners in an extended family. Thus a woman's earned income will, out of family necessity, be used to meet the essential needs of all. There is no real choice to be made, and her benefit is probably little more than temporary peace of mind that hunger has been staved off for a little longer.

The principle of a man's honour being measured by his capacity to provide for his family remains strong. We heard it explained mainly by women within or from Kabul. They told us that paid work by a woman indicates a loss of status which in peace time would be unthinkable. The implication of this observation - that work indicated a loss of status but nowadays is desirable and can be justified on economic grounds - indicates a process of change in social attitudes. It also suggests an underlying perception of change in gender roles, and an opportunity for greater equality.

Case Study on Impact of women's income: Sorkhrud, Jalalabad, Nangarhar province.

Men, not women, are expected to be the breadwinners of the family. In a large meeting of women in Sorkhrud, a district of Nangarhar near Jalalabad city, a woman tells us why she wanted to take part in a poultry management project. Her husband is very old, and now not able to work. She went on to say he was not good, and vividly (and rather crudely, but to the great

amusement of the group) elaborated on what her old sick husband still was good at. (She already had six children.) Her attitude, with which many women seemed to sympathise, was not the respect but of open contempt and derision.

Commentary

That a man is not a real man unless he can provide for his family, seemed to be the message being communicated by this woman. Although a woman becoming the major or only breadwinner for the family may challenge a man's sense of honour, men are increasingly having to accept the contribution a woman can make to family survival. Many women gave examples of their menfolk defending themselves against social criticisms of working wives. Some men expressed pride in their wives' achievements.

While status may be publicly defensible for a man in the context of poverty and high unemployment, perhaps it is more difficult for a man to deal with a loss of respect within his own home. This represents an ultimate risk for a man; he may be able to command respect, but he cannot deny the truth. As in the case of the woman of Sorkhrud, the views of the inside will eventually be aired outside. He is the subject of derision among women, and if they communicate this to their male family members - which some inevitably will - then his status in society becomes challenged.

The implications of this suggest that income earning by married women within a single community needs to be kept in some sort of balance with men's status as providers for their families. Imbalance may cause defensive action by men - not necessarily by the 'weak' husband but by his male relatives or influential men within the community . This could lead to men seeking to maintain their 'controlling' position, and reacting by withdrawal of permission for women to participate in projects.

Key points: Decisions on women's earnings from aid support

- In principle women among beneficiary groups appear to have control over their own income; they decide when and on what it will be spent, or to whom it may be loaned.
- In reality today, poverty denies choice or change to the most vulnerable women. Income earned by many unsupported widows and married women is essential for survival of the family. Many are forced to send their children to scavenge or work, or to institutional care. It is doubtful if such projects can be said to be 'bringing women into development'. They may provide a woman with means of basic survival, but at enormous cost to her own time, and under constant surveillance of wider society. There is insufficient data on numbers who 'make it alone' - without remarrying out of necessity.
- Women earning income is viewed by some as low status, implying that a man can no longer fulfil his duty as provider for his family.
- The fact that some men now permit , and defend, their wife's role as an income-earner, is an indication of changing attitudes. Such attitudes were most prevalent among displaced Kabulis.
- For widows or separated women living with extended family, there seems to be greater likelihood that at least some of her income will be spent on her personal needs. Such expenditure may fulfil basic or status needs.
- Income earning support to married women needs to be sensitive to the balance between women's earning power and man's status to avoid risks of confrontation within the family or community, and possible withdrawal of women's opportunities. A proper understanding of gender roles would ensure that discussion on this takes place among women, and their own solutions explored.

2.3 POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS

In all regions of Afghanistan, except the north, regional governments pronounce, in the name of Islam, on behaviours appropriate to women. The restrictions relate to sectors of work, conditions of work, and public dress (discussed in 2.1.4). Although large numbers of the urban populations, both

male and female, do not individually agree that Islam demands such limitations on women, the majority of men and women publicly comply on grounds of security for the women.

Throughout the country, such constraints have less influence over rural areas. By custom females are well covered when they move into the public domain, and very few work. Thus there is no substantial difference for them, and generally there is neither change in their daily routines, nor comment to such government restrictions unless assistance to their village has stopped as a result.

2.3.1 East - Nangarhar and Laghman provinces

Nangarhar and Laghman provinces

Under the control of the Nangarhar Shura, work opportunities for women are restricted to health and education, both of which may be undertaken publicly (as in hospitals or clinics), as private practitioners, or as home based training. It does not prevent home-based projects in other sectors, and tolerates centre based training for widows in appropriate venues such as a school.

Women were prohibited from working in offices in **mid-1995** from which time the UN discontinued the active service of its local female staff. Currently the UN has only one Jalalabad-based female expatriate staff member, supported by one visiting field officer. NGOs have resident expatriate and local staff working in health, informal education, and income generation. Women continue to work in government offices, and by individual department arrangement can visit specified agency offices.

Segregated offices are necessary for working women, with separate entrances. Communications with male bosses and colleagues are difficult but some view this positively by improving their writing skills, or planning meetings more effectively for the rare meetings they do in fact have. Segregated work places are generally provided by NGOs; without female staff, UN agencies have no immediate need to do so. A number of health programmes have been ignored by the authorities, where men and women provide segregated medical services from separate departments under one roof. There are rare cases of joint medical training, with tacit approval of the authorities.

Female staff generally are able to travel to rural areas in agency vehicles, accompanied only by a driver. Social pressures are so strong that abuse of such trust has not occurred; suggestions of it have led to instant dismissal of staff in order to avoid more personal reprisals. However, large scale female access to agency offices attracts attention and offices are clearly watched; the study team observed this during its one week stay. However stringent the compliance to political demands by working women, this does not stop the risk to their drivers who may be punished for encouraging 'westernised' activities.

> Case Study on Victims of conflicting values, Nangarhar Province
>
> A large meeting including international and national women was held within a UN office compound - abiding by principles of gender equity but against current rulings of the Nangarhar Shura. Official complaints by the authorities were made to the agency, local diplomacies were undertaken, and understandings reached to their mutual satisfaction.
>
> Subsequently and Afghan female stff member, who routinely visits from hr Pakistan duty station, ws stopped at gunpoint in her UN vehicle by men who looked very like the local security forces[12]. The driver was harassed for transporting the woman.

[12] This term is an interesting contradiction in itself - and characterises how ALL authorities in Afghanistan seek to 'protect' their communities. In effect it is to protect themselves against communitiies whom they recognise are not all in sympathy with their particular cause.. In many areas this is explicitly recognised by public disarmament of all except the prevailing authority (which in Afghan society is never totally possible.). 'Peace' wherever it is said to exist in Afghanistan today, is enforced by military power.

Commentary

It is important to recognise how conservative authorities seek to maintain their value system. The woman, whose behaviour was regarded as the cause of the complaint, is not the direct target of the solution to regaining normative behaviour. The threat is directed at men - and usually done in terms of his abuse of Islam which makes it very difficult for an individual to respond without appearing to blaspheme. Risks are thus not only to working women, but also to their male colleagues in the course of carrying out their usual duties.

Agencies need to recognise that their policies and practices can carry risk to all of their stall. It is vital that staff fully understand these, and have opportunity to express their views about them.

Interestingly neither the women nor the men in local agencies who participated in the study workshops on gender-sensitive programming gave particular emphasis to their local government as a threat to the full involvement of women in programmes. Men (almost all Pushtoon) considered the lack of any centralised government, with a clear policy on women, as the major problem to women's participation in society, with tradition and culture being secondary issues. [There was insufficient time to find out if they would change their own traditional and cultural practices in line with legislation. Historical fact does not demonstrate a very positive precedent.] Women believed that traditional values were the greatest obstacle they faced, and analysed these in terms of leading to illiteracy, damaging traditional health practices, and poverty which impeded women's participation in development.

Men emphasised the absence of female staff and the imposed segregation at work as major weakness in their organisations. They seemed unaware that there are substantial numbers of women seeking work opportunities, so that the lack must result from the absence of agency demand. Many were critical of a local new phenomenon - female NGOs. This points reinforces that made above in the Case Study on the impact of women's income - that too much 'success' for women can increase resistance and obstacles by men.

Jalalabad has around six female NGOs, of whom some are Peshawar based, and others seem to operate from the two centres. Although lacking in management expertise, they have shown great resourcefulness in reaching women in rural areas throughout the region for which they undertake personal, unaccompanied, travel and overnight stays with village families. Several of these agencies operate under the umbrella of a male NGO which can undertake first contact with male authorities, and provides support by way of project documentation. While it is good to see such cooperation, there are concerns. From what the study team was able to ascertain, it appears that the umbrella agency takes a share of the operational costs from each of the projects implemented by these female agencies . This seems to include 'multiplication' of some one-time only equipment and personnel costs which is dubious, and particularly so when several such projects are funded by one donor. These matters need to be addressed to avoid any challenge to credibility for the concerned agencies or their donors, or to the continuity of what has been a resourceful and positive development for women.

Key points: Political constraints - Nangarhar and Laghman provinces

- The cultural conservatism of the eastern region is politically reinforced by the Nangarhar Shura in its restrictions on women's opportunities to work in health and education only, in offices segregated from men, and wearing of *burkha*, or *hejab* and *chadar*.
- UN agencies dismissed or paid their national female staff to stay at home and currently have only one expatriate woman based in the field.
- Most NGOs have complied with these regulations; of these some have done so as a conscious adaptive strategy to maintain current opportunities for their female staff and beneficiaries. Male/female integrations has continued for training purposes in a small number of health projects, with authority approvals.

Women's participation in paid work outside the home, and in higher education are relatively new phenomena in Afghan society, only becoming established within the last forty years. In the early 1960s Prime Minister Daud Khan provided access to university education for women. He also banned the veil, starting with his own family, and enfranchised women in 1964 by a decree proclaiming that both men and women had equal rights and obligation before the law.

The 1978 Saur revolution sought to further improve women's rights, largely by challenging traditional practices which it considered to result from patriarchal and feudal ties between men and women. It prohibited bride price and limited dowries; banned forced marriage including the practice of levirate; it introduced minimum ages of consent to marry, to 16 for girls and 18 for boys. Literacy programmes were expanded to provide basic reading and writing skills to all adults - women and men - within a year. In subsequent years young women as well as men were given the chance of education in soviet states. Many of these gained excellent education and are still found among Afghanistan's professionals today. But those memories highest in consciousness today are usually of the women who returned with emancipated ideas which fitted uneasily with traditional values or married foreign husbands; the few who acquired children out of wedlock, or those who failed to return altogether.

Every step forward for women appears to have met with resistance, usually cloaked 'in the name of Islam'. The *Jehad* movement which finally ousted the soviets was no exception and today, for many men, the mere mention of opportunities for women brings back bitter memories of the soviet violations, not only physically against women, but also against the traditional values which are seen to maintain the purity of women. Progress for women has been, and still is by many, believed to be 'corrupting, western, and un-Islamic.'

As study members found while travelling in Afghanistan, this suspicion survives in several areas of the country today. The major obstacle to female participation in aid projects is generally considered to be the traditional seclusion of women (known as *purdah)* which is widely practised in some measure throughout the country. These socio-cultural values are particularly widespread within rural areas which remain relatively untouched by urban opportunities and values. In contrast the benefits of education, of legislations outlined above, and of exposure to external influences have led to more liberal-minded attitudes and behaviour within much of urban society. This has been especially so within the capital city, Kabul, as well as Herat in the west, and Mazar-i-Sharif in the north; and to a lesser degree in the east (Jalalabad) and the south (Kandahar). While these cities respectively reflect dominance by Tajik (capital and west), Uzbek and Turkomen (north), and Pushtoon in the east and south, an ethnic division with respect to the position of women is not necessarily the most useful one to make. The benefit of education, the displacement of peoples throughout almost two decades of conflict, and varying exposures to external influences as refugees or as traders, cuts across ethnicity, and today probably makes it a secondary distinction to that between urban and rural values.

In the years following soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, these cultural constraints have been raised once more to the political level with several party interests exploiting women in their quest for popularity; female protection - in order to assure female purity and hence the honour of man (father or husband) and his tribe - has been used, or perhaps more correctly stated, abused - as a measure of 'true Islam'. History appears to be repeated, as regional controlling political authorities have limited or withdrawn existing freedoms for women, and imposed new restrictions on where and how they work, who with, and what they dress in.

The most recently emerged Taliban Movement has been particularly active in this regard, and has imposed the most stringent controls on all females, women and girls. Women have been denied the right to paid employment outside the home except within the health sector; girls are no longer

- Difficulties of implementing women's projects without female staff has given rise to Afghan female NGOs.
- Local authority regulations are periodically reinforced by physical threats to male colleagues of working women. Agency policies and decision need to be shared with and understood by staff.
- Projects for women continue in all usual sectors. Those outside health and education are approved if targetting widows, although beneficiaries in reality include poor married women too.
- Many women are keen to continue to work, and are achieving rural outreach in health, animal husbandry, and food aid.
- There appears to be a need to balance women's advancement with maintenance of men's status to avoid them imposing greater restrictions which women alone are not in a position to resist.

Paktia province: Khost and Gardez

Although under Taliban rule, their Paktia representatives are generally believed to be a little more open minded than in the south or west. Relatively few of the NGOs who work in this region had developed female projects . Those who had, have managed to continue within the high walls surrounding households in the region with the formal approval of Taliban officials. Near Khost is a pilot project of home-based education, with around thirty per cent girls alongside boys, and a small number of female teachers. Home-based projects for women include loan schemes and a variety of income generating skills ranging from beadwork and tailoring to animal husbandry and pickling.

Female staff are hardest hit, now obliged to work from home to home, accompanied by husbands, and wearing *burkha*. Communications with bosses and colleagues are maintained by two means, in addition to hand memos. Where offices are conveniently located beyond the city limits, the female staff occasionally visit the office with husbands; male bosses also visit their private homes. Road travel is possible for national female staff in agency vehicles, either with an expatriate woman or with a male relative. Provided the vehicle belongs to a locally known agency, Taliban check posts usually wave it through without question.

Although no women were spotted in the main bazaar of Khost, a surprising number were seen in the nearby rural villages to be taking part in animal husbandry, and in agricultural activities alongside their menfolk. Everyday life for them did not appear to be affected by Taliban presence.

Key points: Political constraints - Paktia province

- A small number of NGO female projects continue in this Taliban area including income generation and girls' education, with their tacit but formal approval.
- Strategies to reach women and continue female employment have been totally adaptive, based on building good relations and trust with the authorities, and having gained their formal approval, to maintain a very low profile so that 'rules' are not seen to be challenged. This entails compliance with all restrictions on women including place of work, presence of male guardian, and dress.
- Male workshop participants felt that agencies were weak in exerting pressure on authorities to improve women's status.

2.3.2 Kabul City and environs

Kabul, under Rabbani's self-extended interim government, has treated women with schizoid uncertainty, reflecting different values within their own political alliance, and their sensitivity to the opposition Taliban criticisms of their non-Islamic values. The arrival of the new prime minister and his initial reassurances that women are needed in development, but wearing Islamic dress and so on, is yet another illustration. While in principle women are not prohibited from paid employment -

and they make a significant contribution to both the city's health and education[13] sectors - there have been substantial variations in practices.

Female staff in government offices have been particularly affected. While women currently[14] appear to be a major part of the work force of ministries such as education or social services, they are now barred by others such as transport. which reportedly has sent them all home on full pay. As numbers of aid agencies - and their female staff - have increased as Kabul appeared to stabilise under one political authority, women working in international offices have obviously been under surveillance, and there have been periodic notices to aid agencies announcing that women's employment with foreign agencies was no longer permitted.

In reality, women are contributing to many aspects of Kabul life including all sectors of aid, medical care, education, media, press and literature. They are working in offices as secretaries, and in the university as faculty deans. Aid agency staff relatively freely move around the half-ruined districts of the city, where they can undertake house by house surveys.

How they work is very much a matter of personal and family choice of how they perceive the current trends in social and political values. While many young women within the upmarket areas of Shahr-e-Nau and Wazir Akbar Khan take advantage of their work in international agencies to flaunt their westernised styles of dress and minimal head cover, their more conservative sisters in the increasing number of women's associations adopt full *hejab* and *chadar*. Within most districts of the city, the majority of women wear *burkha* or *chadar namaz* when outside.

Women move around the streets and bazaars on foot usually in small groups, and now on public buses where the former patterns of segregated doors appear to have been replaced by a gender equal access via doors, while maintaining segregated seating. Taxis also are used by the more affluent community to cover longer distances, but remain a source of apprehension for some women. The occasional taxi driver has been enterprising enough to travel with a small child, to reassure both a female passenger and possibly to protect his own reputation.

Although the local government superficially appears to support the participation of women in working life, some of its leaders - military 'commanders' - are believed to be responsible for a new threat to women - being hijacked and forced into 'marriage'. Several commanders have up to ten 'wives'; while some appear to assume family responsibilities for all these and their offspring, others clearly abuse such girls for sexual pleasure. Women's organisations imply, though do not overtly state, concerns over the causes of 'street girls' who sometimes seek help from their organisations.

Key points: Political constraints - Kabul City and environs

- While women in Kabul actively contribute to the widest possible working environment, they are used as pawns in political power struggles and thus are constantly reminded that their present work opportunities, in both government and international agency offices, are tenuous.
- UN and NGO offices have advocated locally for withdrawal of any authority demands that women discontine their agency employment. To date, this has been successful in that authorities have not enforced orders.
- Until recently, women have made personal (or family) choices on how they dressed; the new prime minister has immediately announced by radio restrictions on external dress which should be black *hejab* and *chadar*, and no make-up. This last restriction on make-up is the most personal level thus far attacked by any authority.

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[13] Women account for 70% of all of Kabul's school teaching staff (UNHCR/UNCHS?UNICEF Survey of Schools in Kabul, November 1995.)

[14] Only six months earlier, this was not the case; far fewer women were working in government service. Their increased numbers partially reflects that fact that government ministries are gradually re-assuming fuller services.

- Young women in Kabul are at risk of abduction by local 'commanders'; working women are especially vulnerable because their movements are more predictable and observable.
- Agencies are giving high profile to female oriented projects and hence most employ female staff, expatriate and national. The UN family currently lacks any expatriate female support, but expects very soon to have one female in post.

2.3.3 North: Balkh and Jowzjan provinces

While in Mazar and Kabul city areas there is relative freedom of movement for women, to shop and to work, there are conservative elements of society whose members observe strict *purdah*. Girls will remain uneducated, and women will move about fully covered.

The city undoubtedly represents the most liberal environment for women (and men) at work in all regions visited but the initial euphoria a visit brings should not mask the realities of its geographical limits, or ignore its own conservative elements. While the government is overtly supportive of women in development, it too includes more restrictive elements who are less cooperative. Local knowledge and political awareness are needed to reduce risk to proposed projects.

Such caution is vital within the rural areas of the north where the study team came upon its most conservative communities encountered throughout its tour. Some of these were among the poorest seen and, in one case, the most disillusioned. Having been encouraged to repatriate from Peshawar as a group of over one hundred households some three years ago, to date they have received, only recently, a much needed clean water supply.

> *Look, look at this (as she pointed to her distended belly). My baby dies some months back and it's still inside me. My cow is the same. And here (thrusting a defaecating, half feathered chick under our noses), even this is sick. We're all sick here. Look at the eyes - of the children, of this old woman...*
>
> [Woman of Uzbek village near Aqcha, Jowzjan Province.]

Human rights, and particular women's rights, are reasonably high profile with awareness raised by a national rights NGO who have organised national workshops on human rights, and a UN national human rights team of well qualified women and men. All of these recommended caution with respect to the cause of women. While not ignoring women, one group proposed to focus on the less contentious issue of the rights of the child.

Women are employed in government offices, judiciary, university and education institutes, throughout the health facilities, and agency offices. There is a better level of female expatriate support; the UN agencies have three resident staff. National women are able to work alongside men, and many do with a good sense of supportive comradeship. The government of the north has recently donated a substantial sum to women's programmes through the women's section of its Social Affairs Department. Part of these funds is being used to establish a Women's Council to reach out with non-government aid agencies to improve women's condition and status in rural area. The mechanics of this have not yet been developed, but are open to discussion.

At the study workshop, the male and female project staff in Mazar demonstrated the greatest awareness of each other's programmes, and enormous enthusiasm and commitment to their work. While more inter-agency cooperation was evident here than any other region visited, there is also a great deal of professional competition which manifest itself in thoughtless replication, inconsistent practices which lack underlying policies and, among some, in withholding ideas and plans which would be better shared. Professionally the region presented the widest range of approaches to

bringing women into development, and the only one with NGO and UN agencies attempting gender balanced strategies.

Key points: Political constraints - North, Balkh and Jowzjan provinces

- The buoyant atmosphere among many young aid agency staff should not blind agencies to the conservative element which exists within both the provincial capital, and rural areas around Balkh and Jowzjan.
- Awareness of, and sensitivity to, women's rights are high in these provinces, and are probably part of political power-mongering which make the subject and female programming more risky.
- The fact that local uneducated women are currently very keen to develop themselves, makes it all the more important that interventions are sensitive to conservative attitudes, and that they move slowly forward.
- The wide spectrum of values and attitudes, the availability of international (3 within the UN family) and national female staff, and of some committed NGOs has made this region attractive for piloting new approaches, Inter-agency cooperation is growing here, but competitive attitudes also mar best achievements for women.

2.3.4 Herat City and environs

Once considered to be a fairly progressive city boasting refined culture, now under Taliban control, the situation of women is attracting a great deal of international attention. Under Taliban occupation women have been restricted to work only within the health sector, where they are required to function in segregation from male colleagues, under cover of some all-concealing form of outer dress -the burkha or Iranian *chadar namaz.*

As in every region, agencies are required to 'register' their presence, and explain their programmes, to government offices. Regular liaison is usually necessary, either as a formal requirement, or as an operational technique. Only men can do this.

Case Study Herat: the study team's experience

Beyond the official centres, of government and other offices, the Taliban presence is widely evident. Their white flagged, often armed, and usually crowded vehicles ply up and down the centre of the city. For a fleeting moment as you drive past in your own vehicle, their eyes meet yours, a curious observer; you know you've been spotted.

You shop in the main street and, as the shopkeeper shares some casual observation about his occupied city, you are aware of a large presence behind you - a turbanned presence. You quickly take your purchases and leave.

Taliban are sitting in the park land in the central city streets; they seem to meet at major road junctions and roundabouts; they throng around the great mosque. Seemingly, they are idling away time - in large numbers.

You venture into the back streets, the second-hand bazaar and mix with the local people. Bare headed, quietly spoken, courteous people, clearly showing respect for women as well as men. You return to the main street.

The turbans stand out and constantly attract attention. It's difficult to ignore the Taliban. Their language, culture, appearance - and values are alien to the Herati people.

The assistance achieved

Given the circumstances, it was surprising to find what is going on, through the creativity and efforts of agencies, particularly NGOs, who have shown versatility in dealing with an intransigent governor.

Projects which have Taliban approval include rural health education training, and urban based Mother/Child Health (MCH) which include nutrition and (not officially declared) family planning services if requested (contraceptive pill and increasing demand for condoms). Many women attending clinics come as a group over fairly long distances because of a paucity of rural services. This means that some women and children have endured delay, until their numbers were enough to afford the shared transport costs to seek help.

Without official approval, clandestine service provision continues for very limited groups of up to twenty or more women. Home based income generation classes include carpet weaving, tailoring plus literacy, and a smaller number of loan scheme projects. Reaching them is a cloak and dagger operation to avoid drawing too much attention to the private home in which activities are undertaken.

A new private sector for home-based girls' education - sometimes also including boys - appears to be developing, though it is well concealed. Some such classes start with Q'ranic teaching, which provides basic literacy and numeracy, and add subjects such as science and history later. The average costs are Afs 3,000 per child per month. While many parents are delighted to have such initiatives within their communities, they are quick to point out that this denies proper opportunities to the poorer members of society.

Women's response

Women continue to go about their daily business, fully covered. Rural women travel daily by public transport to the city, where they sit side by side in the public bazaar to sell their home produce, or second-hand clothes. Despite authority orders that women should be fully covered, some defiantly fling back their *burkhas* to expose their faces to potential customers. For the average woman, the impact of the Taliban on her mobility seems less significant than on her form of dress. But this is a rural response. Life is relatively untouched; women have always had limited opportunity, if any.

For women who have been accustomed to lighter cover, the imposition of a *burkha* or large *chadar* is resented. It considerably impedes bodily movement and is suffocatingly hot in summer months. Many of these women now feel conspicuous, rather than anonymous. This is magnified if they continue to work - within or without the approved sector of health; for some, every outing is a nerve wracking experience which affects mental health.

Unemployment and under-deployment of professional women is at a peak. With enormous investment of time and energy, since they cannot meet in large groups, they maintain a wide network. For each other there is mutual support, as well as opportunities for exchanging current experiences, sharing ideas, and developing further programmes to continue assistance to less privileged women.

Although numerically a small percentage of the population, the impact on professional women is the greatest. Their resentment of denied opportunities is bitter. Unusually in Afghan women, whose patience is almost impregnable, this anger reduces some to tears. But it also generates enormous energy and will to resist through persistent, low key action.

They believe that the only hope for the future lies in first initiatives being taken by external agencies. For them, the personal risks are too high, and without the perceived power and influence of an international body, the likely impact too low. In particular they call upon the United Nations to make firm representations on their behalf.

Key points: Political constraints - Herat City and environs

- Programming for women in Herat is difficult in the current political climate, and achievable only with determination and time and effort committed by individuals.
- Only health or health related projects for women are permitted, for which approval on an individual agency basis is necessary. Other assistance projects have survived if hidden away, and continue at risk; the nature of this risk is not known.
- Rural areas appear to be relatively unaffected by Taliban presence, and demand for assistance - including for women - is high.
- Constraints on rural work is the need to use urban female resources for whom travel is not easy.
- Female resources are available in urban areas - particularly among now-redundant government staff - and many are willing to work, even at personal risk, if their security concerns are considered. These include transport, segregated office space, and ideally expatriate women as liaison with male staff and technical support.
- Urban women resent the withdrawal of former rights and choices - and many united in protest (unsupported by men) but were ignored by the governor.
- Local women and agencies feel that insufficient representations have been made to defend their rights, and are clear that this is a responsibility of the United Nations.

2.3.5 Kandahar City

As the headquarters of the Taliban Movement, the restrictions on women as outlined under Herat equally apply here. In terms of atmosphere, there are two striking differences: first that women are virtually invisible within the main city area, and second that the men all look alike. Who is a talib and who is not is confounded by the fact that the male dress now associated with the Taliban Movement is the traditional male costume of this area, notably the style of turban. Thus the regime has more easily imposed the obligation to adopt traditional costume, plus beard, even if individuals had previously abandonned these. To a first-time visitor, the presence of the Taliban seems less threatening. To a local woman, this is not necessarily so.

- *I was scared at first, when a talib stopped me outside... then I realised he was my cousin. I'd never seen him in a lunghi* (turban) *before.* [Woman of Kandahar City]

Women's responses

Business in the bazaar goes on as usual, but not for many women; they are a rare sight. As in Herat, local women say it is possible to go shopping, to visit the tailor in person, and to call on friends as usual, with a child - and burkha; they have the advantage of knowing the shopkeepers. Displaced women from Kabul feel too uncomfortable so that they rarely go out at all.

Assistance achieved

Women throng the hospital-based health services which include a Mother/Child Health Clinic, the International Red Cross hospital including a maternity unit, and no less than three NGOs (one international and two Afghan) offering disability services and training. Despite agency objections, all have been obliged to move into this one location, on grounds of their security. There are additional hospital and clinic services within the city, apparently attended by women although serviced only by men. It was not possible to obtain details on their use by women. From our daily observations of two of these, 'use' was not apparent.

With the exception of one agency where a national woman works from her own office within the agency building, all services operate with segregated facilities. In some cases,female sections are visited by expatriate and even senior Afghan male collegues. One agency has permission for this.

Although none of the women personally objects to male colleagues visiting the female work sections, some instantly cover their faces for fear of criticism - even assault - if reported to the authorities. This deep concern has generated a 'spy culture', making the establishment of trusting relationships extremely difficult. One agency has been 'inspected' and a young woman beaten for exposing her face. She continues to work. A number of projects continue, in secret, as home-based activities.

Health services are provided to peri-urban areas alongside similar services for men. Rural outreach seems to be extremely limited for women within rural areas and other southern provinces. This partly reflects the fact that the south was one of the last regions to receive aid, and agencies had only just started to show interest when the Taliban Movement first took over, and immediately banned female employment.

Professional women at work total around thirty, including five expatriates. Of these only one, Afghan, works within the six UN agencies present. As in Herat, women condemn the Taliban's denial of their rights to work and girl's education. Since aid agencies have relatively recently provided support to the southern region, the women's network is not well developed outside of former government services. Among those, we encountered some sound teachers now engaged in health training.

The female workshop finally permitted in Kandahar provided the first opportunity for the sixteen female participants to meet in three months. It was both a high spirited and emotional affair. Because of the potential security risks, and to avoid subsequent punishment to the individual who negotiated official approval for over four hours, this workshop was not announced in writing, nor on the subject of gender issues. Agency heads and their female staff were each asked if they would like to participate; in response to their enthusiasm but cautions on subject matter, the workshop addressed how to improve health services to families in Kandahar. While this was a major compromise of the principles behind the study's team's mission, the adaptive strategy was more than justified by the benefit gained by the participants' opportunity to meet together.

Key points: Political constraints - Kandahar City

- In the present political climate, and given the limitations of agency historical presence here and their sectoral capacities, there seems to be no opportunity for assistance to women other than in health in Kandahar.
- There is demand to expand the urban. and to improve rural outreach, services in preventive reproductive health. Female resources, though possibly with limited skills, can be found with time; they are willing to work within the political constraints with support as for Heart.
- Data are needed to support the many claims that rural areas in Kandahar and other provinces are demanding assistance, including income generation support for women and education for girls. Subject to location, these might be reached by routes other than from Kandahar City.
- Despite the generalised constraints of working with the Taliban authorities, agency relations here appeared to be better than in Herat.. Factors may be an extra year's experience, smaller number of agencies, far fewer female oriented projects and programmes.

2.4 SUMMARY: Women's access to aid - restricted rights and means

Socio-cultural context

- Afghanistan today remains a deep-rooted, strictly segregated patriarchal society dominated more by tribal values than by the liberal lifestyle which central governments throughout the century have sought to introduce. Historical precedents appear to be repeated in the present-day widespread increased conservatism which follows the soviet thrust to reform tribal practices and to improve the status of women.
- Throughout Afghan society, marriage is the basic institution of society. Not only is it an essential duty to ensure the reproduction of the family and the community of Islam, but it is a vital means of sustaining, consolidating, and of initiating unity and peaceful coexistence between families and within tribes, and of inculcating the next generation with the same proper values. This is the core role of woman, the fulfilment of which is not seen to necessitate her moving beyond her household domain. The role of men is to deal with all that takes place in the external public domain, which substantially covers productive work and community relations.
- Men's undue attention to, verbal and physical assault, of women are increasing levels of violations against female purity. As this is closely tied to male honour, and for the more conservative or religious, to tribal status, it must be defended. Violations lead to conflict which usually involves use of guns before tongues and resolution, which in tribal communities will often include the exchange of women. Violations against women have been, and continue to be, deliberate manipulations both to insult and to provoke men.
- Years of conflict have destroyed social and even family relationships and mistrust increases conservatism; this means greater protection of women which translates into tighter restrictions on their mobility, activities, and appearance. At the same time, new indicators of change exist in rural areas where there is acceptance of, and even demand for, women's projects in health, literacy, or skills training, and education for girls. Catalysts are extreme poverty and fears for future survival, returnees from Iran and Pakistan, and displaced from urban areas - particularly Kabulis who appear all over the country.
- The practice of female seclusion seeks to preserve the integrity of woman, of family and of tribe. It cannot be ignored in any social context, in any of the regions visited. For the significant majority of women of Afghanistan it means they do not have access, both in terms of the right or means of approach, to the world beyond their household responsibilities without the permission and guardianship of men.

Urban-rural divide

- As a predominantly rural society, processes of change have been slow. A generation of conflict has destroyed pre-existing infrastructures. The impact of urban education and liberal influences have not penetrated much beyond the major cities and towns throughout the country. This has created a significant urban: rural divide.
- Whereas major cities such as Kabul, Herat and Mazar have had a core of educated emancipated and professional women who have participated more fully in social life, the majority of rural women lack access even to health and education. Maternal mortality is 1,700:100,000; female literacy believed to be 4 per cent. Afghanistan ranks lowest on the Gender-related Development Index and Gender Empowerment Measure.
- The practice of seclusion also impacts upon working women who have crossed the traditional female boundaries into the public, male domain. Although their employment reflects a more liberal family attitude, the wider norms of a conservative society mean that such women are constantly scrutinised and thus at risk of negative and harmful misinterpretations of their actions and behaviour.

Political restrictions on women

- All major authorities in Afghanistan appear to exploit the status of women as a political issue. The dominating party in the northern provinces under Dostum has in recent months shown active interest in supporting regional conferences on women's rights, soliciting positive interest from the international aid community. This contrasts with all other major political influences who have imposed restrictions on women in terms of type of paid work, freedom of mobility, and outside dress - all being justified 'in the name of Islam'.

- In Jalalabad in the east under the Nangarhar Shura, women have been obliged to work and travel in strict segregation from men, only within health or education, and fully covered by a black *hejab* and *chadar*. Infringements can result in verbal or physical abuse against their male colleagues.
- The capital, Kabul, has generated tension for working women with changing restrictions, and has recently introduced new rules on dress (as Jalalabad), and personal appearance. While currently more women are working, this carries greater risk of abduction for forced marriage or sexual assault by gun-toting commanders.
- The Taliban Movement, in control of Kandahar and Herat, has gone even further than others and prohibited all employment to women except within the health sector, and forbidden school education for all girls. Its dress code is the *burkha* which is restrictive of vision and mobility, and connotes backward rural values.
- In terms of restrictions on women, all authority requirements - including those of the Taliban Movement - are a distortion in degree rather than in kind from the widely accepted social norms of the major part of Afghan society. Rural areas are scarcely affected by them, and Taliban presence here is limited. Country women have never had access to education, rarely had employment outside the home, and are well covered by a *chadar* or *burkha* on any rare outings beyond their domestic domains. These facts, combined with the Taliban disarmament of commanders and the resulting improved security, are a substantial explanation of why the Taliban have been so readily accepted in their provincial advances.
- Social values are inevitably shared by many agency national staff, particularly men, and will very likely be observed within private social life. In the prevailing social and political environment, it is unrealistic to expect that all agency men will actually believe in gender equity, and they may be reluctant to practice it even within their work. Social pressures, peer pressures, and political pressures on men, are coercive. This needs to be recognised as an internal obstacle to achieving women's participation both within the organisation and in its programmes. Agencies need to keep this in mind, and maintain a balance between their mandates to improve opportunities for women, and the security and commitment of their male and female staff.

Implications for projects

Who to talk to:

- Women's participation in projects requires permission of men. This routinely includes first approaches to community leaders and through them the approval of key male relatives (father, husband, or brother). In areas close to political authorities, approval will also be necessary from them. Personal Afghan networks are the most likely to achieve positive outcomes, though expatriates may be valuable in gaining first entry.
- Knowledge of the community, building trust, and time to achieve these are essentials to success.
- Changes to restrictions on women are beginning to emerge as a result of economic pressure. Men are beginning to support women's access to assistance. Closed doors are cracking open.
- While even conservative society does not totally exclude the participation of women in assistance programmes, agencies need to be sensitive to how far and how fast they can proceed. Too great a challenge to men will result in increased restrictions on women which they are powerless to resist.

Where:

- Female projects need to be implemented in a female only environment - the greater the segregation, the more likely permission will be given by decision-makers, whether they be in the family or the local authority.
- Home-based projects in rural areas need to be held in a household approved by the community leadership; their choice will reflect influence and inevitably entail some pre-selected beneficiaries. Agencies need to be firm about beneficiary selection, which should involve the widest possible female network of influence.

How many women:

- Small groups of less than ten will almost certainly represent one extended family, which marriage and living patterns make it difficult to overcome.
- Larger group activities are particularly welcomed by women as a respite from social and emotional isolation within the immediate family. Group projects are especially valuable for widows, in particular those who are unsupported, to build confidence and share new coping strategies with others who understand. Time and resources to accommodate these needs should be added to projects.

By whom:

- Female projects need to be implemented by women. In all regions visited there are women who are keen to work and, despite constraints upon them, some manage to do so. In all areas they take risks - to reputations but also to male colleagues or family - to earn necessary income and to support their less fortunate sisters.
- Given the extremely high illiteracy in the country, these women are a valuable human resource. Many do not have skills adequate to the tasks given to them which are well outside their conventional government services. They need to be managed and coordinated; they need to learn to manage, and be given opportunity to develop skills and knowledge appropriate to their jobs and interests. Many agencies appear to by-pass them with training opportunities - because local women present accommodation and travel problems - or ensure they receive their fair share of in-house support services.
- Travel companions for Afghan women have to be considered since not all are willing, or permitted, to travel without a male family member. An international woman can sometimes double as an 'honorary male' and acceptable chaperone; agencies need to check out what is possible and acceptable with all parties, including the staff member herself whose family need such reassurances.
- Overnight stays are possible in some areas, provided agreement and arrangements are made in advance. Since many UN guest houses do not accept Afghan nationals[15], and public hotels are not acceptable if they exist, such arrangements have to be fully negotiated in terms of personal and social perceptions either with NGOs or private families. In rural areas, the latter is the only likely possibility; the family of the local leader or of female networks (see below), with approval of the local leadership, are options.
- Age, dress, and personal presentation of female implementing staff all have a bearing on their likely acceptability within a community. Discussion on this needs to be part of project preparation, and should focus on achievement of project objectives for beneficiary women, rather than on personal statements by the implementing staff.
- International women are necessary in the most restrictive areas to provide liaison between national staff and male colleagues or community members, to provide technical support, and to give moral support.

Networks to women

- Female networks *within communities* are via respected females whose status is derived from socially recognised authority of their male relatives, their own religious merit (as traditional birth attendants or Qu'ranic teachers), or their professional skills in health or education. *Between rural communities*, women can often network through their natal kin. *Urban to rural networks* are most readily achieved via local urban professional women, (and sometimes men) who frequently have village relatives. *Female staff* can be found via urban personal networks of professional women who maintain contact with former school or college friends, often throughout displacement or exile.
- All female networking takes time. Care needs to be taken not to abuse personal relationships which are inevitably entailed in such networks. Agencies must be responsible for confirming suitability of such contacts.

Female decision making

- Husbands - or fathers, brothers - make major decisions regarding women. A number of women seek to reduce their dependency on men, but a majority do not question this order of things.
- Female relatives are confidantes and usually allies, of necessity. While not totally trusting of each other, they will join forces to influence major decisions via their husbands. Women in extended families have an advantage here. In single-family units, daughters will solicit support of their mothers, but she alone is unlikely to have major influence over her husband if he has objections.
- Women who make independent decisions include unsupported and elderly widows, younger widows with limited support, and mature women married to old or sick husbands. Their increased autonomy is viewed as a mixed blessing. Unsupported widows appreciate group projects as a supportive forum for redefining their status, and affirming their confidence.

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[15] A peculiar act of racial discrimination which is not consistent with its own refusal to accept segregated offices for women on grounds of its gender discrimination.

permitted to go to school. Extremist[1] values, imposed in the name of Islam, are the cornerstone of the Taliban Movement which, at the time of writing, is in control of the south, the west, and a number of the central provinces of Afghanistan. As they seem set to impose their rule throughout the country, apprehensions have increased as to how assistance to women may be maintained and improved.

In this socio-cultural and political environment, both reaching women as beneficiaries, and employing women in order to implement projects, have been seriously limited and make it difficult to uphold principles of non-discrimination.

Conscious efforts had been made by agencies towards ensuring that women, as well as men, benefit from emergency and rehabilitation support. There has been an increasing trend in projects directly targetted at women. These projects have focussed on the common areas of concern to all women in underdeveloped countries - health, education, and income generation - and for which Afghanistan's ratings are among the lowest in the world.

Maternal mortality is reported to be to be 1,700:100,000 live births[2]; female adult literacy levels reported[3] as 12.7 per cent in 1992 are now believed now to be as low as 4 per cent; women are estimated[4] to have a mere 7 per cent of income earned by both sexes. The achievements in a country in these basic human capabilities - of living a long and healthy life, gaining education and knowledge, and having a decent standard of living - are compared between women and men in the Gender-Related Development Index. The opportunity for women to utilise opportunities in life are assessed in the Gender Empowerment Measure on the basis of women's share in decision making by active participation in economic and political life. In both indices[5], Afghanistan ranks last among the 130 countries included.

Current programming for women is intended to address these concerns within a framework of segregation, and through activities which have been considered to be culturally acceptable because they conform with those traditionally undertaken by Afghan women. This has been the agency perspective, an 'outside' view.. Whether such projects are relevant to the needs and interests of women themselves, or effective in making some positive change to their physical or social well-being, is not really known. Women themselves have not been asked for this 'inside' view.

More recently, many agencies have placed greater emphasis on community approaches. This reflects a move from risks of creating dependency upon external agencies offering emergency assistance, towards building greater indigenous self-reliance and sustainability through community participation in rehabilitation initiatives. What exactly is incorporated into this approach is rarely defined. *Who* constitutes such 'communities', or *how* they are involved - whether they contribute in terms of material or human resources, or in terms of the process of rehabilitation projects from conceptualisation to evaluation - are issues which frequently lack clarity both of intention, and of practice. In particular, there are concerns about where women fit into this approach, or even if they are accommodated at all.

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[1] The term 'extremist' is used in preference to 'fundamental' which properly implies reference to core principles and values at source. Current restrictions on women are widely regarded to be an extreme interpretation of Islam's basic teachings.

[2] *The Progress of Nations 1996*. UNICEF, New York: 1996.

[3] *Human Development Report 1995*, United Nations Development Programme, New York/Oxford: Oxford, 1995.(Table A2.1, Women and Educational Opportunity).

[4] Ibid, (Table 3.1 Gender-related Development Index.

[5] Ibid. (Tables 3.1 and 3.5 respectively).

PART THREE

WAYS FORWARD

Women's earnings:

- A woman's project income, whether married or single, appears to be hers to spend as she chooses. Loans may be given to family members, and are repaid. Purchases for herself can fulfil basic (for example, medical) or status needs. Because of widespread economic hardship among the beneficiary groups questioned, most women use their earnings for poverty alleviation. Choice, and self, are not considerations when children's bellies are to be filled.

Agency concerns on female human rights

- For the significant minority of urban women, and particularly the educated and liberal minded, authority restrictions are a withdrawal of previously enjoyed freedoms. Many professional and liberal-minded women bitterly resent the imposition of such ultra-conservative, and superficial values. Others give secondary importance to new dress codes, and view opportunity to practice their profession, to secure necessary income for their families, and to help their nation as the primary issues. While the violations they suffer may be considered less than those of their sisters, they are highly significant in that they represent the essential human resources needed to support female programmes.
- Looking at the overall situation of Afghanistan, it is clear that for the majority of women in Afghanistan, progress and politics scarcely touch them except, as a result of conflict, to increase their already heavy burdens. Human rights violations for these women are not a new - or a Taliban - issue: they continue to be the essence of their existence. This majority of women, uneducated and rural, have no access - either in terms of right or means, to assistance: assistance must seek them.

3 REACHING OUT TO WOMEN: planning, strategies and resources

The previous chapter showed how the majority of women in Afghanistan are effectively denied both the right and the means of approaching or reaching resources or services outside their immediate household and family area of responsibilities. Control over their lives is exercised immediately by fathers and husbands, and beyond by male dominated social and political values. While it is clear that we do not have the right of directly approaching Afghanistan's women, what are the means by which we presently do, or perhaps do not, manage to circumvent the obstacles/?

'How' is the subject of this chapter. The terms of reference of this study were to look at the gender perspective in evidence in women's programming. From our initial review of documentation, and input from individuals and the Advisory Group to the UN on Gender Issues in Afghanistan, it was very clear that few agencies had a clear understanding of what gender means. For this reason we decided not to approach the study or the report within a formal gender framework of analysis. Instead we decided to use the realities we found to illustrate what is being done, to comment on how things might be improved if done within a gender framework, to draw upon positive examples wherever possible, and to highlight what is missing altogether. The nine regional workshops[1] were used to ascertain implementing staff's views on gender responsive programming, looking at the Strengths and Weaknesses within their agencies, and the Opportunities (called 'Positive Chances' to facilitate translation) and Threats from the environment which might help or hinder them. (Workshop data are summarised in Tables 4 - 7 at the end of this chapter.)

The content of this chapter draws upon the project proposal review which represented the range of projects associated with women (health, non-formal education, various types of skills training)., field meetings and project visits (Tables 2 and 3) with implementation staff, and workshop data.

All three showed consistent patterns. On the one hand, there is a strong focus on 'doing' projects with women, often for reasons which are not clear in the context of an agency's known history of interests or present range of skills and capacities. This reflects the most detailed sections of proposals, describing Goals, Objectives and Activities. In workshops the greatest input from participants was on issues related to resources (human, financial and material) and controls (decision marking, participation, values and attitudes).

On the other hand there was poor knowledge among most agency staff about the wider contexts of women's lives, how projects fit into agency programming approaches, or about actual benefits achieved. This reflected poor or missing information in proposals describing the Situation, Policy, Strategy or Problem, and methods of Monitoring or Evaluation. In workshops, participants contributed fewer ideas which related to policies and strategies; agencies who had them are reflected in 'Strengths' (Table 4), but comparatively few participants saw the lack of these as 'Weaknesses' (Table 5) within their organisations.

The underlying cause of this appeared to be a poor understanding of sound project planning, and this must be a concern for all agencies. As implementation staff are (presumably) the closest to the ground-level realities and the beneficiaries, their participation in the planning process seems to be

[1] A management tool of problem analysis which looks at the Strengths and Weaknesses of the internal environment (in this case aid agencies) and the Opportunities and Threats of the external environment. With this information, we can work towards optimising the S and O, and minimising the W and T. Workshops briefly introduced what we meant by gender-responsive programming, and then participants applied SWOT analysis to their own situations. The classification of their views - into Resources (human, financial, material), Controls (decision making, participation, attitudes), Policies (on gender equality, human or women's rights) and Strategies (type of agency intervention, of project implementation) - was developed as a final overview of their inputs, and not as a mans of structuring their thoughts.

essential, and for this they need to understand relevant issues. Even if they cannot write easily, they must have an overview of where projects are coming from, how they fit with policies, and where they are going - from the perspectives of both the agency and beneficiary.

The chapter is organised in four sections. The first section covers the proposal documents and outlines the key information one might expect to result from a sound planning process and which would help clearer thinking from a gender perspective. The second section of the chapter provides description and commentary on agency's intervention strategies. Section three looks at the various implementation strategies adopted in the most politically restrictive regions of the Taliban Movement. The final section looks at issues of human resources needed to reach women.

Our purpose here is to start the process of thinking about all projects and programmes in terms of people before technologies, and of beneficiaries in terms of social relationships between women/girls and men/boys, rather than of numbers. Gender analysis training should provide skills in looking at the inequalities in male:female social relationships - and particularly those which unfairly discriminate against women and girls - and will then provide a broader context into which this will fit.

3.1 PROJECT PLANNING TO SUPPORT WOMEN

Both structure and content of the majority of project proposals indicated conceptual gaps which reflected a need for improved skills in both project planning/proposal writing and gender analysis, As these were all funded projects, this suggested that the lack of understanding applied both to implementing agencies and to donor agencies.

Background/Justification to virtually all proposals includes a rather standardised paragraph outlining the numbers of years of war, the list of disasters that it has brought (already well known), and a generalised statement that women are in special need of whatever is being proposed. Additional statements may be included on the particular problems of widows, or of vulnerable women (who exactly these are is not defined) , and justification for support based on the traditional practice of seclusion of women which has denied them access. As reported in the previous chapter, seclusion is widespread but it is not completely uniform.

Usually there is nothing about the particularities of the situation of women/girls in relation to men/boys, in the context of the concerned sector, or how that it is visible within the particular community. This information is necessary to convince us that there is an issue which adversely affects women compared to men, and which explains the need for the project to change that situation.

A classic bad example is the story that that water has to be collected some distance from the village by women, which justifies the need for a clean water hand pump within the village itself, which will reduce women's labour and 'will bring women into development'[2]. These are all often assumptions, made by men, and based on generalised views of the social roles of men and women, rather than upon local realities. Thorough analysis of the situation might reveal a number of highly relevant facts. Here are some possibilities - based on the realities in Afghanistan.

The provision of a village-centred water pump may not be appropriate or relevant *for women* because: (a) women actually like the location of the existing water supply because it justifies them leaving their compounds and having a chance to gossip with other women and do the household laundry, which the village-centred pump, more visible to men, would deny; (b) women do not

[2] Not all water project proposals are presently as crudely as this, but it is sufficiently representative in concepts to justify its use for illustrative purposes.

understand the benefits of clean water to their families; (c) it is not in fact the women who collect water - they delegate their responsibility to their children; (d) women may have some other priority need - which can differ from that identified by (male) community leaders - but they have not been directly consulted; (e) village men genuinely believe that their wives deserve to save time by access to a local water supply, but anticipate that the women will then spend that extra time gained to help husbands in the fields, feed the animals, or weave more carpets. Thus women do not decide for themselves what they will do with their saved time. In reality a local supply may be increasing women's work load, for reasons they do not fully understand, from which they will not receive any personal benefit. This is not 'bringing women into development' but 'increasing their bondage'.

All of this does not deny that a clean water supply is highly desirable - but clean water needs to be justified on the basis of a local analysis of the problems for men, women and children arising from the existing source, and the benefits for all from a new supply. Recognition of the different interests of female and male within the community would reflect an awareness of gender concerns. If this analysis shows some unfair treatment for women that a local supply can resolve and women want, then a gender issue is being addressed. An example might be that women want a local supply because they say they suffer from back pain from carrying heavy loads over long distances, and this complaint is supported by local high incidence of complicated pregnancies or miscarriages, and referrals for treatment of back pain.

Policy Guidelines are usually not referred to at all so that it is not clear why the existing situation should lead to our concern for women. If this is the way things are, and have always been, why are we trying to change them? Virtually no project document makes implicit or explicit reference to any policy within its organisation on gender equality, which clarifies their present concern with women.

Very few participants of the study were familiar with UN charters and conventions; no implementing staff (but some heads of regional offices) among UN agencies made reference to the 'UN Operational Strategy on Gender Issues in Afghanistan' issued on 23 March 1996. This outlines key charters and conventions mandating gender equity, and states that 'as a matter of principle the United Nations Agencies can be expected to stand by the UN Charter and related international Conventions which may or may not have been ratified by the member state concerned.'

Problem to be addressed As documents lacked both a thorough situation analysis and a policy statement, it follows that the particular problem for women, in relation to men, was not always clearly identified. As most projects seem not to have consulted women at all, then the identified problem is an external view, and may not reflect the key concerns of women.

'Intervention' strategy describes the method we will use to address the problem. These strategies include service delivery (provision of vaccination, supplies, buildings), capacity building (training), community development (supporting people to support themselves), awareness raising (advocacy). Ideally the choice should be directed at the underlying cause of the problem, which would result from a situation analysis. As most agencies do not have this range of options within their organisations, and have not done a situation analysis, they therefore focus on what they can do, rather than solicit support from another agency with the more appropriate capacities.

If we return to the example given in the Background above, the water pump installation in the village centre is provided as service delivery. Since the underlying problems relate to women's subservient role to men in all decision-making, the hand pump installation - which totally neglects her interests, needs and views - reinforces this; gender issues are not identified or addressed.

If installation were based on information and facts gleaned from women, such as their physical sufferings and birth complications attributable (at least partially) to distant water collection, then the first project goal might be to advocate for immediate provision of alternative water collectors

Table 4: Summary of Strengths within organisations to support gender responsive programming. Source: Regional SWOT Workshops

STRENGTHS	KHOST Male only	JALALABAD Male	JALALABAD Female	KABUL Mixed	MAZAR Mixed	HERAT Male	HERAT Female	KANDAHAR Male only
RESOURCES								
Human	F. staff	M/F professional staff	F. NGOs	F.staff F.technical staff	F.staff F.professionals F.technical staff	F.staff	F.resources available	F.staff
Financial				F.specific funds			Finance	F.specific funds
Material					Mixed offices			f/M training opportunities
CONTROLS								
F.authority	F.in management		F.in management					
F.participation	F/M planning	F/M planning	F/M planning	F/M in planning F/M monitoring			F surveying F monitoring	
Attitudes to F.			Supportive Seek outside support to F.	Supportive Gain outside support to F. Equality practised	Supportive M/F solidarity			Positive staff attitudes
POLICIES								
Gender	Gender policy Equality in education		Gender policy	Gender policy	Gender policy	Gender policy		Gender policy
F. human rights								Mandate for F.human rights + budget + f.educ.focus
Personnel				Equal employment opportunity Equal benefits		Equal benefits		
STRATEGIES								
Implementation		Community participation			Community approach Parallel prog.	Community approach	Segregated	
Obstacle management	Capacity bldg Segregated F. projects	Capacity bldg Teacher tr. Segregated offices	Segregated F.projects OK fr Authority Segregated offices		Segregated F. projects	Equal benefit Home-based		Parallel prog. Capacity bldg in Health
Type - F. support	Basic needs Health	Basic needs	Basic needs	Basic Needs MCH	Basic Needs		Basic Needs Health	Basic Needs Health

Table 4: Summary of Strengths within organisations to support gender responsive programming. Source: Regional SWOT Workshops

STRENGTHS	KHOST Male only	JALALABAD Male	JALALABAD Female	KABUL Mixed	MAZAR Mixed	HERAT Male	HERAT Female	KANDAHAR Male only
RESOURCES								
Human	F. staff	M/F professional staff	F. NGOs	F.staff F.technical staff	F.staff F.professionals F.technical staff	F.staff	F.resources available	F.staff
Financial				F.specific funds			Finance	F.specific funds
Material					Mixed offices			f/M training opportunities
CONTROLS								
F.authority	F.in management		F.in manage-ment					
F.participation	F/M planning	F/M planning	F/M planning	F/M in planning F/M monitoring			F surveying F monitoring	
Attitudes to F.			Supportive Seek outside support to F.	Supportive Gain outside support to F. Equality practised	Supportive M/F solidarity			Positive staff attitudes
POLICIES								
Gender	Gender policy Equality in education		Gender policy	Gender policy	Gender policy	Gender policy		Gender policy
F. human rights								Mandate for F.human rights + budget + f.educ.focus
Personnel				Equal employ-ment opportunity Equal benefits		Equal benefits		
STRATEGIES								
Implementation		Community participation			Community approach Parallel prog.	Community approach	Segregated	Parallel prog. Capacity bldg in Health
Obstacle management	Capacity bldg Segregated F. projects	Capacity bldg Teacher tr. Segregated offices	Segregated F.projects OK fr Authority Segregated offices		Segregated F. projects	Equal benefit Home-based		
Type - F. support	Basic needs Health	Basic needs	Basic needs	Basic Needs MCH	Basic Needs		Basic Needs Health	Basic Needs Health

Table 6: Summary of Opportunities (Chances) in external environment for gender responsive programming. Source: Regional SWOT Workshops

STRENGTHS	KHOST	JALALABAD		KABUL	MAZAR	HEART		KANDAHAR
	Male only	Male	Female	Mixed	Mixed	Male	Female	Male only
RESOURCES								
Human		High motavation of M. and F.		High motivation of F.		F. resources available	F.hi motivation to work	
Financial	Funds for F. education							
Material								
CONTROLS								
F.authority		Communities eager for: ■ knowledge ■ better living conditions	Communities seek better quality of life.	Community exposure to better life styles	Community trust			Community exposure to better life styles
F.participation		Willing to participate	Willing to participate Supportive of F. projects	Willing to support F. and participate F. keen to change Family support		Community support high	Community support despite threats F.keen to change Family support	
Attitudes to F.		Local authority supportive of F. - including work			Security good Good relations with local auth. Media/TV/radio			Good relations with local auth. International interest Islamic F.rights
POLICIES								
Gender	Donor /UN /NGO interest in gender			Donor interest				
F. human rights				International concern on F human rights				
Personnel								
STRATEGIES								
Implementation						F.keen to work in groups		
Obstacle management				Economic pressure is catalyst to change		Use Health as entry to F. Use M relatives to reach women		Use Health as entry to F. Home-based
Type - F. support		Demand for Basic Needs ■ Health	Demand high Basic Needs ■ Health ■ Education	Demand high		Demand high		Demand high Basic Needs ■ Income Generation for

Table 7: Summary of Threats from external environment to gender responsive programming. Source: Regional SWOT Workshops

STRENGTHS	KHOST Male only	JALALABAD Male	 Female	KABUL Mixed	MAZAR Mixed	HEART Male	 Female	KANDAHAR Male only
RESOURCES **Human** **Financial** **Material**		Limited funding	Limited funding		Limited funding	No funding		Limited funding
CONTROLS **F.authority** **F.participation** **Attitudes to F.**	Social pressures Men deny permission Multiple political gps	Social pressure Social values ■ seclusion ■ traditional practices Political instability Security	Social pressure Social values ■ F low status Political instability Security	Social pressure Family pressure Security Political restrictions on F.	Political instability Security	Political restrictions on F.	Social pressure Family M deny permissons	Conservative values No social sub-structure for gender equality Misinterpretation of Islam Mines Political harassment of F.
POLICIES **Gender** **F. human rights** **Personnel**	No national policy for F.	No national policy for F.		No national policy for F.	UN/NGOs lack ■ common policy ■ coordination			Authority attitudes to gender No political sub-structure to support gender
STRATEGIES **Implementation** **Obstacle management** **Type - F. support**		Poverty Traditional practices	Poverty Illiteracy Traditional practices		Poverty Illiteracy		Illitteracy	Illiteracy - no common curriculum attempted

(draught animal). Thus a clear identification of the gender issues and their causes, may well lead to different intervention strategies. Water pump installation may still follow, but resulting from discussion with women as well as men on possible solutions to their problems. Perhaps final agreement could be reached on a mutually acceptable, and more accessible but also more private location, for women to easily collect water, but also continue their female networks. This would also address the core gender issue since women are brought into the decision making process, as well as the men who traditionally dominate this. All of this can take place within the gender segregated framework of Afghan society - but only by consulting both women and men.

Goal(s) is a statement of intent, to address a clear problem by use of a selected intervention strategy.

Implementation strategy will explain the means by which the goal(s) will be translated into objectives. Following from the above, we could ask clinic staff to raise with husbands the welfare of their wives (too slow, and probably resolving specific cases only), or persuade concerned husbands to talk to the village leaders and mullah about alternative solutions to collection and new supply in the context of loss of life and ill-affordable transport costs to take wives for treatment. We may also mobilise women through female networks, TBAs, clinic to discuss unnecessary costs for treatment and loss of life, and to discuss with women what their solutions might be.

Objectives outline the purpose and the methods, together with planned outcomes, of the project. They need to be realistic, and achievable.

Activities details the sequence of actions necessary to fulfill objectives, in a stated time frame.

Monitoring should be specified and include qualitative as well as quantitative indicators to check ongoing progress according to plan, with measures of achievement at key stages so that remedial action can be taken if necessary. Qualitative gender specific indicators are generally not well developed, and need to be addressed per sector.

Evaluation, is different from monitoring in that it can only take place after the project is finished, It is a measure or measures of the project's success which should relate to the project objectives and hence its goals and outcomes. It differs from impact assessment which looks at the overall effects of the project on the beneficiary and her community.

Key points: Project planning

- Poor skills in project planning, particularly among implementing staff, inhibit sound understanding of women's concerns and issues, and of providing real benefit to women.
- Particular omissions are a situation analysis to identify gender issues and inform on underlying causes of gender disparity; a (statement on) agency gender policy which, in the context of the situation, highlights particular problems; strategies of intervention appropriate to the problem rather than to agency convenience; qualitative and often sound quantitative monitoring indicators to support actual improvements for women; and evaluation of project achievements.
- These shortcomings are of major concern because their absence means there is no way of knowing whether projects for women even address their interests, or make any change to their lives[3].

[3] This situation is by no means exclusive to women's projects and programmes; it applies to the greater part of assistance programmes in Afghanistan.

3.2 PROGRAMME STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT WOMEN

3.2.1 'Women's specific' projects

When asked how they approach women's projects, agency representatives at all levels will reply that they adopt a strategy of 'women's specific' projects, and justify it on the basis of the widespread practice of seclusion of women, and enhancing women's traditional interests. Few people differentiate between projects which address women's biological needs - such as maternity services, ante- and post-natal services - and are therefore not the subject of gender concerns.

Most such respondents believe that the mere existence of women-focussed assistance contributes to 'bringing women into development'. There is an implicit assumption that project interests are highly relevant, and represent the specific needs and interests of women in Afghanistan (these are discussed in chapter 4) which differ from those of men because of their respective socially defined roles. While these are 'gender concerns' , there is also an implicit contradiction in any expectation that enhancing women's traditional activities alone is likely to lead to an (undefined) change in their social status in such a deeply patriarchal society.

This pervasive understanding of women's specific projects is too simplistic. As we have seen in section 3.1 above, an intervention strategy ought to follow from a sound analysis of the situation and problem identification in relation to agency policy, and this is not taking place in most projects currently addressing women. These weaknesses in project identification are compounded by a lack of knowledge of gender approaches, and dependency upon too few and under-experienced human resources (discussed in 3.3).

'Women's specific' projects is a strategy used within a gender framework, where it describes interventions which address **clearly identified disparities** between women and men. The focus on women aims to reduce that 'gender gap', and lead to some overall improvement in the condition (physical or material) and position (social) of women.

In current programming for women, the particular context is not usually properly analysed, and the situation and roles of men in the context of women's projects are very often overlooked. While health services and literacy seek to improve female opportunities, they often neglect the realities than within the same communities, men too lack similar opportunities. Although the improvement of women is a commendable step forward, within the socio-cultural - and increasingly the political - context, greater advantages to women over men run risk of meeting with resistance by men, if not immediately, then at the point when women's improvement becomes apparent; or with criticism by men when women's continued good performance is at risk.

'Bringing women into development' by providing income earning skills to widows is a sound objective, providing it gives both the means of improving - and sustaining - material and social position. In order to adequately achieve these, and particularly in the socio-cultural context, the role of men must also be considered within the context of the specific skill. Here is an example which overlooked one final step.

Case Study 1: Poultry training (1995), village near Gardez

A young widow of 21 years, living with her in-laws (including a disabled father-in-law), earns enough from the sale of eggs to support herself and assist the rest of her family. She pays for her son's education, buys cloth and threads for embroidery (self-taught) which she also successfully sells, and pays for her medical treatment of the dreadful headaches she suffers since her husband's death. She proudly showed us her son's schoolbag and his neat copy books.

Despite her and her mother-in-law's best attention, her flock is slowly reducing through some disease outside her range of knowledge. She would like more professional advice. She does not know where to seek help; nor does her father-in-law or neighbours. The agency which provided the original training had a vet when they introduced the project, but his salary has since been cut from project funding.

Commentary

In this case, success and economic sustainability for a whole family are under threat because of lack of information - which could be in the control both of the widow, and of the community. In rural communities, people's world's are often very small, and what goes on even in a nearby village is not widely known. Unlike a id agencies, they do not have ready access to transport to ride around and get an overview of activities. Nor do they usually have regular meetings with neighbouring villages when information could be exchanged.

A family's view of the world is often further reduced through insurmountable stresses such as war, widowhood, displacement, and disability. Coping with all, as in this case, requires enormous involvement of emotional resources within the family. There is probably very little energy left to pursue external interests - and here, only one elderly man to do so.

The problems with the project is that the agency has not sought to replace dependency on itself. The widow herself cannot explore the outside world - this is the domain of men. As a displaced family, she does not have established female networks through whom she could mobilise interest in the problem. For similar reasons the elderly disabled father-in-law does not have a strong voice within the community of men. Thus the most vulnerable have the least influence. Without thoughtful project planning, the solid material and the tenuous social benefits the widow has gained (particularly in being able to send her son to school), are now at risk. In a patriarchal society, men who are supposedly in control of all aspects of the family and the community's small universe, cannot be seen to be wrong. In the present case, the losses are at risk of being credited to the inadequate skills of the young widow. A solution would be to mobilise village leaders to replaced this essential professional linkage (of use to others in the community). there is an established veterinary clinic in a nearby village.

Projects offering income generation are particularly vulnerable to these concerns. It is almost exclusively men who deal with external material and human resources: they buy raw materials, market the finished product, access all external support. With rare exceptions, we know that women lack access to directly undertake these tasks. Thus men need support and even training on how to improve their initial selection of items, how to broaden market opportunities, or make linkages with essential support networks. These are important considerations if incomes are to be more than mere 'bread' money, as explained by several of our poorest interviewees, and be sustainable. There are also means of building men's recognition of women's capacities, and mutual respect and trust, which are essential to change negative attitudes and behaviour.

There are positive examples of 'women's specific' projects, which have resulted from a closer look at the realities of people's lives within the local community. Although none has been formally evaluated on the basis of sound criteria, feedback from beneficiaries and the wider community is encouraging. The (rare) good quality non-formal education projects for women provide effective literacy training, and knowledge and confidence building on relevant issues such as hygiene and health, immunisation, land-mines, peace, by means of participative group discussion. Women graduate with increased capacity to deal independently with their daily lives. These projects have targetted illiterate women in urban areas where there are immediate opportunities for them to apply their skills with routine concerns such as visit to hospitals, clinics, bazaars which had previously been hindered because they could not read, and had to depend upon availability of husbands - or their educated children.

> I want to find my way around the city... If I can read I can go alone, without husband or children.
>
> *[Middle-aged woman from Deh Dadi, Balkh province.]*

Similarly, quality veterinary health training (which is also rare) provided for women as food security (not income generation) in distant rural areas has sought to increase women's knowledge and skills to manage household livestock in terms of better feeding, breeding, disease protection and control. Instead of depending upon men who are not directly involved with the livestock, women themselves learn to identify key problems and can specify (through men) the correct medication to be bought, or need for a visit by the professional (male) established veterinarian who appropriately has been linked in to the women's network and is familiar with their programme and activities. Their improved livestock and their personal control over it contributes food security to the family, reduces her time and concern with the task, and gains increased respect for them - albeit in a small way.

Women's specific projects can be delivered by any of the intervention approaches outlined in 3.1 above. Most agencies currently adopt a service delivery strategy. Among these the study team would include many skills training courses on the grounds that the majority of women say they attend for the material incentives they gain rather than the skill, and because the quality and duration of such training are inadequate (see chapter 4) so that capacity building does not take place. Some genuine capacity building is achieved by the few better skills training courses such as the positive examples given above, and a variety of health training courses.

Because of lack of inadequate skills in planning and gender analysis, most women's projects in Afghanistan have served to fulfil agency objectives of accessing women; with success measured by numbers of women reached. This has resulted from treating women as an issue, and has reduced the overall positive impact that might be gained.

By viewing women from a gender perspective - as one half of Afghanistan's population, by considering the roles and relationships between women and men, and designing projects which reduce the disparities between them in a sustainable way - 'women's specific' projects can make positive changes both to their condition and their position in society. And this is possible in Afghanistan, as the positive examples above indicate. 'Women's specific' projects - even if well designed - do not alone constitute an effective strategy to broaden women's involvement in wider society.

Key points: 'women's specific' projects as presently practiced

- Reinforce and perpetuate existing status relations between women and men and thus deny opportunity for changing negative social attitudes and behaviour towards women and girls.
- Are based on very generalised perceptions of female traditional roles, lacking in adequate localised social analysis; many fail to provide sustainable material benefit and most fail to address women's status.
- Do not differentiate between women's biological needs and gender concerns arising from their social roles.
- Major use of service delivery which maintains women as passive recipients of welfare type support.
- Do not contribute understanding of the roles and relations between women and men with respect to decision making, access to resources, division of labour, or community communications. Without such information - which is not usually well understood by most national staff - it is not easy to improve current services.
- Fail to consider men's vital roles within the particular activities which cannot yet be overcome within the socio-cultural context. This reduces material benefits, and jeopardise women's small status gains which are particularly important for widows.
- Where local contexts and social relationships have been adequately analysed, rare projects demonstrate gender perspectives and appear to give positive benefits (though lack clear monitoring indicators or evaluation).

3.2.2 Parallel programming

Parallel programming means that services are planned and implemented for both men and women, but separately. The objective is to provide equal service opportunities; it does not necessarily mean that services are used equally. This strategy is most frequently used in the health sector, but

is also found within education where separate schools are provided for boys and girls. A small number of NGOs have stated that whereas they do not necessarily provide the same services for men and women, they operate a principle of budgeting equally or proportionately, between women and men.

In visiting rural communities in Afghanistan, it was disappointing to find that existing or requested clinics were targetted at mother and child - meeting necessary biological and female health concerns - but without considering any service to men. Although it is easier for men to obtain medical services in urban bazaars, visits from rural areas are delayed or not made on grounds of cost, limited transport and poor road conditions, and time lost to productive activities or work opportunities. Parallel male services can be provided, at little extra cost, by reserving specific times in clinics for men. If local male expertise is lacking, and it is never as short as is female expertise, men have an advantage in that they can readily travel to take part in centre-based village health worker training projects.

Parallel programming brings with it increased opportunities for greater equality in work opportunities between men and women, particularly at the level of implementation. This partly results from the strategy itself, but it is encouraged within a context of female seclusion as in the east, and imposed in the west and south because of political restrictions on men and women interacting in the work place.

A clinic in a suburban district of Kandahar is a creative combination of parallel programming to meet community needs, and gender balance in work opportunities. The managing NGO has the good fortune of having a husband and wife medical team. This enables the lady doctor, a gynaecologist, to routinely work alongside her husband and thus, more or less, comply with Taliban restrictions on working women. As a paediatrician he deals with children, brought usually by mother; the presence of his wife in the adjacent surgery makes this acceptable to the largely conservative community. The couple are supported by a female vaccinator and a female nurse for mother and child surgeries. At specific times he deals alone with male patients.

Disability organisations are taking a particular lead in planning to improve women's status by using parallel programming to encourage the treatment of disabled females. In a secluded society it is too easy to hide them away and deny opportunity to a better quality of life. Gender balance in staffing - women to treat female clients - combined with village level advocacy on the availability of female services, is targetted at encouraging treatment of disabled women and girls.

The need for segregated female services creates new professional opportunities for women, and currently there is training projects for physiotherapists, prosthetists or orthotists.

> *I couldn't finish my studies at university, so I was very pleased to get this chance...*
> *There aren't many jobs here now for women..*
>
> [Nangarhar Province: two prosthetics trainees in Jalalabad]

In a Jalalabad prosthetics workshop young women are being trained alongside men, and by male teachers. This is tolerated, despite the Shura's periodic demands for female segregation at work. Both trainers and female trainees defend social criticisms on grounds of the need for services for female disabled. The young women said that once people knew what they were doing (i.e. they were 'not just going to offices'), they were quiet and showed some respect.

Segregation was required, and is observed, by the Jalalabad physiotherapy training school which is for women only. The insistence on gender separation here may be that while the prosthetics

workshop is within the agency's operational premises, the physiotherapy training takes place in a formal, more public, institution.

In Kandahar, on-job training for men and women in making and fitting artificial limbs and disability supports, and physiotherapy training and services are carried out in one building, now divided into two in order to achieve gender segregated services. The women feel reluctant to remove their *burkhas* even inside the workplace, and can possibly boast that they have the only prosthetist who works in such a garment.

Parallel programming is also adopted by the education sector, where facilities (school buildings) and material resources are separately planned (in quantitative terms) for male or female students[4]. Here it needs to be emphasised that parallel programming is used as a positive strategy to ensure equal opportunities to boys and girls, particularly in areas where female education has been denied or has not been the norm. Equal access does not imply equal use, despite agency best efforts; all too often even agencies rush to provide the structure, but give no thought to resources to make the process of education happen. Thus nothing is in reality achieved for either girls or boys.

Key points: Parallel programming

- Parallel programming is most often adopted by health and to a lesser degree by education assistance, historically in compliance with conservative social values but increasingly in response to political restrictions..
- By definition it is segregationist (although there are some exceptions), but offers gender balance in beneficiary access which may improve female social status (eg by education, by treatment of disabilities).
- Almost all such services presently offer very limited opportunity for participation by service users, and in effect many perpetuate strong dependency on service provision.
- It generates increased work opportunities for women, often at a professional level., which bring them both material and status benefits.
- Is making small but significant contributions to gender issues in disability through improved access to women/girl beneficiaries, and increasing professional training opportunities for women which carry material and status benefits.

3.2.3 Community projects - neglecting women

Among the intervention strategies outlined earlier, community approaches would appear to offer sound opportunities to involve women; they are inevitably around half of any community. Questions to which the study sought answers included how were women involved in the community process? Were women's needs and interests being recognised? Were women upset if they were excluded?

Community projects cover construction (schools, clinics, roads), irrigation, agriculture, animal husbandry, sanitation and water supply. Most agencies argue that these are not women's concerns, sometimes qualifying this further by stating that women are indirect beneficiaries. Community leaders claim to represent the whole community, and consult the women - and agencies accept this.

A white-bearded sage wryly observed that the study team seemed to doubt that he and his *shura* colleagues spoke to their womenfolk about community concerns. Subsequent discussions with the women of the same community - as found elsewhere, supported the team's reservations, but also provided valuable qualifications.

[4] Local authorities also create gender distinctions in education. While Taliban authorities deny access to education for women except for Q'ranic studies, the Kabul authority makes distinctions in the curriculum, planning to teach logic only to boys, and psychology only to girls - apparently reflecting their respective social needs.

This study was commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme following a recommendation of the Advisory Group to the UN on Gender Issues in Afghanistan. UN, donor and NGO agencies had shared concerns that assistance programmes in Afghanistan were not adequately addressing or achieving the participation of women; participation being understood to mean that women have fair and equal opportunity in relation to men to give their views on, make contributions to, and share benefits of assistance programmes and projects.

The study was intended to address the outreach, relevance, and effectiveness of assistance programmes for women in different parts of the country. Specific objectives were to (a) to examine, analyse and document current approaches towards addressing the needs and interests of women, and (b) by drawing on lessons from recent experiences, to produce practical recommendations and guidelines on how to maximise the effectiveness of UN and NGO programmes in reaching women and responding to their needs. The full terms of reference are included in Annexe 1.

1.2 SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

1.2.1 Team membership

The team finally consisted of two women, one British (team leader), and one Afghan acting both as assistant and translator. The originally planned third team member, an Afghan man, missed the northern region visit for personal reasons,. For security reasons[6], at the request of the team leader, he was excluded from the western and southern regions.

1.2.2 Methods used

Mixed approaches were used in all locations and were aimed at achieving input from a wide range of participants involved in female programming. They included the following:

- semi-structured interviews with female beneficiaries of projects, plus other community women (see Annexe 2 for issues addressed in a sample questionnaire).

  Questionnaires were developed by the team members to address the key issues of the study: participation of women, including decision-making, in all stages of projects, and in benefits gained, their interests and needs, and in actual benefits and their use. Questionnaires were not followed rigidly, but discreetly retained as a reminder to interviewers of the issues to be addressed. If discussion made valuable elaboration on a relevant issues, this was pursued.

- focus group discussions with community women or men on how to reach women, and who could help.

- workshops with female and/or[7] male project staff from UN/INGO/NNGO/Government agencies to (a) briefly introduce what is meant by gender, and (b) brainstorm on how to introduce gender responsive approaches to programming, using a SWOT analysis.

- formal and informal meetings with agency project personnel on experiences and approaches to programming for women

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[6] Following experiences in the first three field visits, it was concluded that in these Taliban-held areas male interviews were likely to be biased without well-established rapport, and might attract unwanted attention and possible risks both to the women being interviewed, and to the female t team members.

[7] Joint workshops were held in Kabul and Mazar. Politico-social restrictions necessitated gender segregated workshops in Khost (where there were insufficient women to held a workshop), in Jalalabad, and in Heart and Kandahar where they provided the first opportunity that women to meet together in over three months.

We hear through rumours, through children.
I learned about the road only after my son had started working on it...
We don't know. We've never been to the city, nor to school, so how can we give our opinions.
We are women, and we are inside. Men - commanders, elders - know better than us, We don't know.
[Balkh Province:, women of Dawlatabad]

The effect of this spatial distinction (discussed in chapter one) on women's inclusion in community affairs was qualified by another woman.

Men make decisions outside and those aren't discussed with women. If some help is (proposed) for women, then men do check with their wives. [Balkh Province: women in Dawlatabad]

This raises the question of whether the outside:inside division between men and women allows men to recognise women's activities which are part of her family 'reproductive' responsibilities but in fact take her out of the household environment. The answer appears to be 'no'.

In a community-based potable water and sanitation project within Kabul City - which has achieved miracles in bringing medieval streets running with ordure into the twentieth century - the community leader (*wakil*) and the implementing agency affirmed that their project had - though the men - been agreed with the involvement of the women. But the women had not been consulted.

We heard about it when the wakil announced to the men for community work to clean the wells before work started.
[Kabul City, woman of District 2]

When asked how the project had helped them, the women clearly acknowledged the advantages it had brought - but did not include any specific benefit to themselves.

Yes, (the water system and sanitation) is a big improvement. Before, the waste was on the street and harmful to children, and all the family. The steps up are a big help to the old in carrying water in the winter.
[Kabul City: women of District 2]

It transpired[5] that the women were not entirely happy with the water supply - they had different ideas about the siting of several hand pumps; although there were technical reasons for the specific locations for these, the women were unaware of that fact. Nor was water - no matter how beneficial to the environment, to the children, or to the old - their chief concern. The large group of women met in District 2 were unanimous, though not unappreciative.

Food is the real priority ..... but this (water and sanitation) is a big help.
[Kabul City, women of District 2]

A woman's interest or concern becomes a gender issue when women feel they are being ignored at the expense of the men. Our question then is do the women of Afghanistan feel that this is the case? Although a small number of women - such as the one cited above - acknowledge that men 'know best' (because of their better education and experience), in most cases, the answer is yes, they do.

We'd be happy to be asked, but in war people are killed without knowing why. It's anarchy; no-one cares for women's ideas. [Balkh Province, woman of Dawlatabad]

[5] Information from an NGO subsequently cooperating with the same agency to provide health training for women.

In terms of its objective, to restore accessible clean water to the community, the Kabul City water and sanitation project is highly successful. Unlike many similar projects, it made no pretence to 'bring women into the development process'. It is commended for having achieved a solid 'community' approach, and it has achieved participation in decision making, implementation, monitoring, and maintenance. It has assisted the 'community' to identify its own capacity to recognise and overcome its problems. But it totally overlooked the fact that community means women as well as men.

The project was conceived - as it would be by most men in Afghanistan both in communities and agencies - at the technical level. This all too often neglects the human relationships involved. This is not only the traditional division of labour, which recognises that collecting water is a domestic, woman's, role, and ensuring a source of supply, whether pump or river, belongs to the outside world, the domain of men. Social relationships also include differences between women, men and children in terms of burden of work, benefits, participation, and control. Almost invariably women lose out.

The reality is that women's needs and interests are generally not taken up by men who maintain control over all decision making. That their views frequently differ, despite what men say happens in Afghanistan, is documented in an enlightening report on needs assessment conducted in several rural areas of the country.[6]

Many 'community' projects address the most basic requirements of water, shelter, health, food security, education, to which women and men have equal need for human survival. Re-phrased, these are not so much human needs, as human rights. While some people will undoubtedly argue that in few societies do both women and men enjoy equal say in precisely what is provided, when, where, and how, and by whom, in communities as small as most in Afghanistan the channels to women's involvement are not insurmountably complicated. And Afghanistan ranks lowest on indicators of equality between women and men (see 1.1).

It is such basic rights of survival which can more easily be justified as belonging to the interests of all - women as well as men. Although political restrictions in some urban areas are serious obstructions, the widespread socio-cultural constraints can be managed in smaller towns and the many rural communities removed from urban political authorities. These represent the majority of the population among whom gender issues can be addressed, and were seen by regional workshop participants as the greatest opportunity to introducing gender responsive programming.

In the context of such manifest destruction, all communities recognise that choices have to be made of what should come first. As the Kabul project has shown, while men wanted the local potable water, women's preference was for food support. While there is anecdotal evidence of the benefits gained by the project, there are also increasing concerns - both anecdotal and documented[7] - about the incidence of chronic malnutrition among children under five years, particularly girls. Both water and food are clearly essential and visible to all.

Similar issues exist throughout Afghanistan though particular mention can be made of water supply which is one of the most frequent 'first entry' points to any community everywhere. While such

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[6] *'Participatory Assessment of Needs (PAN): A study in selected rural areas of Afghanistan'.* October 1995. Peshawar: Norwegian Project Office, Rural Rehabilitation Association for Afghanistan..

[7] *'Nutritional Status and Mortality Rate of Children below Five Years of Age in Kabul City through a Neighbourhood Survey - April/May 1995'.* Kabul, Kabul Emergency Programme.. A French NGO, Action Internationale Contre la Faim, undertook a follow-up around June 1996, on which results are pending.

projects variously claim to be directly or only indirectly involving women, the reality is that women have a key role to play in the water cycle, they are not consulted at any stage of the project cycle, and there is a serious lack of evidence to support claims that they benefit either directly or indirectly. In many cases, as water engineers 'outside' proudly make claims for the merits to women - and to family health - of the newly installed hand pump, on the 'inside' women are continuing to use their original shallow, hand-dug, and probably unclean well water. The risks of this are most probably not understood since women were also not included in any accompanying health and hygiene training. But it is convenient, it offers social opportunities, they know how it works and can manage routine maintenance their own way - and its 'theirs', not the men's.

In all such basic requirements, women and men both have some social role to play, even if it is not public. Implementing agencies cannot continue to turn a blind eye to these realities, and continue to dish out the easy option of technical solutions to human conditions. While individual aid agencies alone cannot fulfil all priorities, each can use the opportunity to address the social roles, and thus the known discrimination in decision making, and ensure that both women and men are heard, their priorities considered, and consensus achieved. This is a challenge that could - and should - be turned into an opportunity far more frequently than it presently is.

Key points: Community projects as currently practiced

- Misrepresent the meaning of 'community' because, with rare exceptions, all ignore women.
- Naively assume that male leaders represent the views of women - in a known patriarchal society..
- Male leadership does not normally consult women on 'community issues' because it does not acknowledge any female activity outside her household 'reproductive' role.
- Women do express different interests and priorities from men - which represent 'gender concerns'.
- While some women explain men's superior capacities to make community decisions (because of experience of the outside world, or education), this does not imply that they are all happy with their secondary position. Many illiterate rural women are aware that their interests and needs are ignored by men, and are dissatisfied. This sense of grievance represents 'gender issues' which agencies should address in their work.
- Most projects opt for technical solutions which ignore social roles and relationships - and hence are oblivious of gender issues.
- In the context of widespread destruction, people are aware that choices have to be made. A strong case can be made for the need to consult all members of a community in order to achieve consensus. The availability of data would significantly assist this process.
- Many such projects address basic elements of human survival - water, food, shelter, health, education - to which all, female and male, require equal access. These represent the essence of all human rights charters and conventions and ought to be seen not as basic needs, but as basic rights.
- These projects - particularly within the context of a sound community approach, or water supply which is a frequent entry point - offer opportunities to address the most fundamental gender issue of bringing women into decision making; this is an opportunity recognised by Afghan male and female implementing staff.
- While political restrictions may obstruct city responses, opportunities exist in the smaller towns and rural areas where the greater part of Afghanistan's population live. Socio-cultural constraints are not an insurmountable obstacle.

3.2.4 How to improve: a gender perspective

Thus far we have seen that current application of women's specific and even community approaches are not going far enough to address the inequalities endured by women in Afghanistan, If agencies are to address these and aim to make a difference for women as well as men within the community, then they need tools to analyse the roles and relationships between them, and a strategy to address discrimination..

Outsiders in any novel environment often draw conclusions from what they see, rather than pause to reflect upon alternative interpretations. In Afghanistan men are highly visible; women scarcely appear to exist. It is easy to endorse the cultural segregation of women, and similarly 'put them aside'. The men are accessible, they make decisions, they say go ahead, the project is implemented. The people - the men - are happy, and implementers feel good. The cultural norms - of discrimination - have been reinforced. What happens if, instead of looking superficially, we analyse the task?

Task analysis

Take another look at the water supply. To understand what is involved, questions need to be asked such as Who does what? Who has access to what? Who decides what, and how? Who benefits, and how?

In terms of providing water, responsibility lies with all of the village members. Usually the village is represented by a small group of influential men - elders, mullahs,*maliks, wakils, arbabs*, and/or commanders - generally known as the *shura* (council of elders). They have a **community role** as decision makers. In the context of water, they will decide location, maintenance, and control of its source and distribution.

This latter task will become the responsiblity of a *mehraboshi*, whose task is to control distribution of the main water supply through various irrigation systems. This water is needed for agricultural use by individual 'farmers'. They are primarily engaged in growing food crops for domestic use, for exchange or sale, or for earning income through salary in cash or kind. This is a **productive role** - to which, in some regions, women also contribute, without reward, alongside their husbands, particularly during harvest periods.

In terms of domestic use of water, responsibility lies with the women who collect - or arrange for their children to collect - it for household use by all the family, and any domestic livestock. These tasks are concerned with the **reproductive role** of maintaining the household and its members, to which her biological reproduction ensures family continuity.

Each family is represented by a man - father, husband, brother, or a son. He acts as intermediary between service users (himself and female family members) and the service supplier. If there is no water in the household, and the explanation is because there is no water in the village, then he will make demands of one or all of the members of the shura. This is his community role.

As described in chapter two, the water collection point for women is what the *chaikhana* (tea house) is for men; it is a key opportunity for community relations between women. For many women it is the only opportunity to meet with women outside their immediate family compound, and for the most secluded women it is highly valued. As we learned in chapter two water collection is the only social activity in which women can engage without permission from their menfolk.

Thus the provision of water to a village is an integrated task, involving different roles and relationships between men and women. These reproductive, productive, and community roles of men and women reflect gender divisions of labour within a specific social context. Analysis of these gender roles in relations to any activity can provide valuable insights into best approaches, and likely impact, of proposed assistance.

Levels of benefit

In terms of development assistance, water supply has a general welfare benefit for all. The issue for gender analysis concerns the improvement for women relative to that of men. As women are

the water collectors, a new supply has more implications for them in saving of energy, possibly reducing health risks, and time for other activities.

If access to water is improved, what do women do with the time gained? Will they use it in their own interests - personal income earning activity or rest; or will they be obliged to help their husbands? Gender analysis is not concerned only with improved access to water, but also with women's control over the benefit gained.

The next question is whether women recognise the inequalities in their own situation; are these thoughts shared with others? This level is called 'conscientisation' - 'awareness' is an easier term.

Might this awareness catalyse them into discussion with other women on common problems and solutions - in effect, mobilise them towards independent action? As the provision of water illustrates, women have a key role which has implications for the traditional division of labour and decision making, as well as technical aspects of service provision. Women's active involvement is relevant not only on how such resources are allocated, but also to how things are done.

Lastly, gender analysis considers the issue of control. The water example has revealed several aspects. There is control over project development - the nature of the problem and its solution. If this introduces some new technology - intended to be maintained and managed by women - this further removes control from women's hands. There is also the question of whether women can independently decide how to use their time gained, or spend income earned from activities undertaken during that time.

Applying a gender framework: tools, policy and strategies

The 'Women's Empowerment and Equality Framework' is an analytic tool to aid understanding of women's progress in development. It combines gender equality with women's empowerment, which should be present at each level. It proposes five dimensions - **Welfare, Access, Awareness, Mobilisation, and Control** - of women's 'empowerment'; that is the process by which equality is achieved between women and men in access to and control of resources. This assumes that equality between women and men is an objective of assistance, and that development is seen as a process of empowerment - people improving their own capacities to recognise and overcome their problems. This is diagramatically represented below in Figure 1.

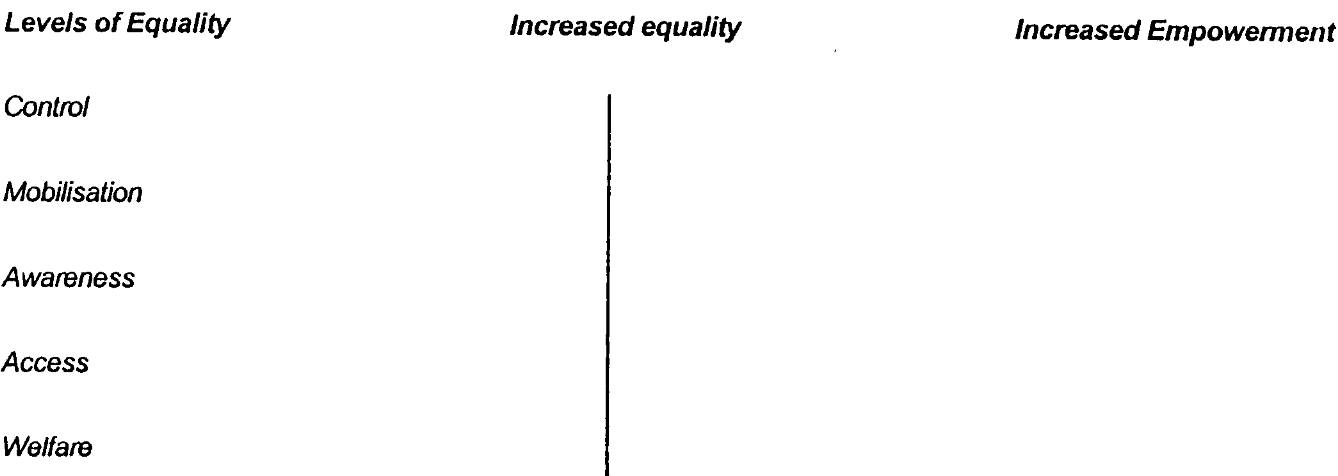


Figure 1: Women's Empowerment and Equality Framework [8] describes women's advancement to equal status in terms of five levels of equality with empowerment necessary at every level

[8] Source: Sara Longwe (1981) '*Gender Awareness: The Missing Elements in the Third World Development Project*'. Oxford, Oxfam.

This tool allows each objective, project, or programme to be 'measured' in order to ascertain what level of women's progress towards equality with men is being addressed. If a project is to positively contribute to women's development, by overcoming gender inequality and empowering women, then it should ideally include all five dimensions. If objectives are limited to welfare alone, then women are being treated as passive beneficiaries. They are not being brought into the development process

In terms of policy, the UN position was outlined in section 1.1 as one of gender equality. The same document outlined the strategy to be used in order to translate that policy into programming practice. In summary this commits agencies to ensure that women's participation is promoted in all stages of all programmes and projects, to increase benefits to both material and status needs either together with or separate from men.

This strategy is termed 'gender mainstreaming'. Participation by women does not imply that women are also expected to contribute to road digging; it does imply that they must minimally be party to the decision that the road is a priority need for the community, and have the opportunity to give input at other stages - such as who and how (among the men) should be directly involved - if they want to.

Within a gender framework, 'mainstreaming', 'women's specific' projects, and 'women's biological needs' are the key strategies used. All, properly applied, entail analysis using a tool such as the WEEF above, of tasks and roles - not much different from writing a series of departmental job descriptions. In terms of the intervention strategies outline in section 3.1, there is a positive relationship between the five levels and service delivery capacity building, and community 'empowerment' approaches. Advocacy cross-cuts all levels and strategies.

Key points: Gender perspective

- Gender analysis can help to improve projects for women by looking at the respective roles of women and men in the social context of the given task. This enables identification of gender disparities in efforts, in control, in benefits, and ensures that these are identified, and then addressed.
- Improvements for women can be targetted at different levels, ranging from handing out welfare assistance, to improving access, creating awareness, generating mobilisation, up to facilitating women achieving independent control over factors affecting their own lives ('empowerment').
- Gender analysis and associated tools, such as the Women's Equality and Empowerment Framework, can be adapted to analyse objectives, projects, and programmes.
- This assumes a policy of gender equality, to which UN agencies are bound
- Strategies to implement the policy include 'mainstreaming' (apply to all projects to ensure women's participation), women's specific projects to address recognised disparities and improve women's share, as well as projects addressing women's biological needs.
- Gender analysis can be applied to all programme intervention strategies of service delivery, capacity building, or community empowerment.

3.2.5 Community approaches: opportunities and positive examples

Unlike the water example outlined in 3..2.3, there are rare examples of projects which have set out with the intention to involve both men and women. While none has adopted a formal gender analysis and methodology, their community approach has led to a basic understanding of gender relations and disparities.

This has been elaborated by UNICEF. Its particular selection by the study was on grounds of its dual value as a tool to measure community development, in exactly the same way.

Participation of women in identifying needs; building women's status

This project adopted a multi-sectoral approach and mainstreamed gender equality from the outset.. Community men and women were asked to identify their priority needs. This was done by asking male and female patients attending the local clinic to go home and discuss with family and neighbours, Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) were used to extend further into the female community. The community identified its key needs to be readily accessible health services for men and women, and improved economic security for its poorest members.

The specific services were pre-selected by discussion between MoPH, partner agencies and community elders, then 'marketed' via the elders, mosques, and the village clinic to take it back into households and to women. Economic security is to include urban-based training for men in soap making, with the idea that they then train family members for home-based family production and local sale. While there is an element of gender equality here, specific gender issues which need to be addressed are who will make the decisions on production and sale, and who receives the cash benefit of work and makes decisions on how it is spent.. Diary cows are planned for widows and female-headed households - a women's specific strategy to enhance status as family breadwinner.

Health was agreed to come first. The health component showed gender balance in its training of men as village health workers (VHWs), and women as TBAs (addressing women's biological needs), all chosen by the 16 or so homes that each was intended to serve. These VHWs and TBAs were linked in to a local clinic where they obtained their skills training, and made weekly reporting visits to replenish supplies, and discuss any points of concern. This arrangement provided back-up for the village level workers, and linkage with more professional services - including to city hospitals. All trainees operate from home, where they are accessible to their localised households.

In terms of benefits to trainees, the project lacked clear monitoring indicators and evaluation criteria. However, anecdotal qualitative indicators came from the TBAs. They reported that they felt more confident with their new understanding, and believed their social status had increased from demonstrating their improved skills (six out of seven had undertaken successful deliveries, two with minor complications, since their training).

> *Before I just waited for things to happen. Now I know there is a procedure, and I know if something is not right. I am more confident about dealing with problems like bleeding - and if I think there is some problem, I can send the women to the clinic.*
>
> *I feel more important because I am in more control of what I do. Even men show me more respect.*
>
> *People respect us more... Now we know something and have been trained.*
>
> [Nangarhar Province, Sorkhrud district, newly trained TBAs]

Status was the key benefit to these women; because their activity is viewed as an act of faith, it carries no fixed payment so they would not consider making any charge for their services. Because of generalised economic hardship, they often do not receive any in-kind reward which is customarily very limited for the birth of girls in this strongly Pushtoon area.

With male counterparts, men of the community also felt they were receiving good health care. The project offered good potential for expanding into increased community awareness of a variety of gender issues, with both men and women being addressed simultaneously. One query was the wisdom of training one of the TBAs who was both young (22 years) and unmarried. She had been keen to learn a valuable skill and was interested in health; concerns that she was perhaps not entirely acceptable to a conservative society where the role is usually held by an experienced or mature woman may have been the reason why she alone of the trainees had not yet been asked to attend a birth. One delivery within her households had been undertaken by another TBA.

Although the TBA trainees perhaps had a vested interest in making positive statements, they expressed the view that women in the community approved of the decision making process and were looking forward to the outcome. Although not comprehensive in terms of gender issues, the project represents a good start. Subsequent political conflict prevented follow-up.

Key points: Participation of women

- Women can be involved in decision making if appropriate networks are used. These include the male leadership, and influential women (in this case clinic health staff and existing TBAs).
- Men and women need to be consulted independently, with an approved linkage to exchange and share views.

Mobilisation of women

Another agency attempting to apply gender equality within its target communities has adopted a 'time-phased' approach to circumvent the socio-cultural constraints. Implementation of support to men and women is undertaken at different periods of time. The agency first of all provides a service to meet a 'community' issue (water supply) - which excludes women. This is justified on the grounds that it provides the opportunity to gain the trust of the men, after which the agency proposes that its female staff might provide some service to the women.

With respect to male participation in female services, minimally this approach has involved discussion with and approval from the local authority, the community leadership, and announcement - often via the mosque - to the wider male community who then agree, or not, the inclusion of their own female members. Sympathetic men within the community - identified by agency men - are often targetted as allies to influence leadership and other men. As discussed in section 2.2.2, women's participation in a project is subject to the permission of husbands or fathers.

All such projects require substantial community liaison initially by male agency staff. Once a female project is agreed, successes appear to have been increased by the female team making a preliminary visit to meet key community leaders. Superficially this is to introduce their plans for women; in reality it is a chance for the leadership to confirm or reject a provisional commitment based on what they think of the female liaison officer or project manager.

Clearly this is not an ideal project from a gender perspective. Its exclusion of women in the original decision making on water supply maintained patriarchal dominance over a resource in which are equally if not more involved than men. But it had given the issue some thought, and come up with a 'generic' approach which it could apply everywhere, by means of a very cautious adaptive strategy - delay in time.

The choice of support to women by the agency is also not ideal - again being based on a 'generic' approach. It undermines women's ability to identify their own needs. In fact this was strongly brought home to the agency when, in the next village where they attempted to introduce the project, the women actually objected to the agency choice, demanding maternity and delivery care only.

Despite these weaknesses, the time-delayed adaptive strategy did serve to gain support of men which held strong when women - newly aware of their own capacities - decided to move themselves forward.

Case Study on ' Mobilisation' by rural women near Aqcha, Jowzjan province

This is a meeting between a community liaison officer (CLO) and village women who want to talk about their plan to form a women's group. The mood was excited, and expectant. Many of the thirty of so women squeezed into a tiny room had just completed training in human and animal health. Following this, they wanted more so they mobilised themselves to discuss and agree what and how. They decided on literacy training, and Q'ranic teaching. This was the first independent action taken by the village women; it was also the first instance for the agency of its trainees taking independent following the agency's introductory project.

The women had agreed on their group's officers to manage funds, projects, premises, and representation. A home-based room had been volunteered and agreed on criteria that it was accessible to most women, discreetly located, and would not attract undue attention - particularly from men. They had agreed a 'student' fee of of Afs 1,000 each per month. A class size of thirty was considered to be manageable for the teacher, who would receive a salary of Afs 30,000 per month (their student income), based on government rates. They had identified possible teachers.

The problems they brought to the CLO were the teachers, and material resources. The best qualified teacher wanted rates they could not afford from their proposed income. After much discussion in which the CLO refused to make decisions, the women concluded that a second-best teacher was adequate for their immediate needs, and she would be approached again. The proposed Q'ranic teacher was called so that the CLO could confirm her willingness to teach at the proposed rate; she agreed. The CLO's task was thus reduced to considering how her agency (with no education expertise) might gain external support for material resources.

Commentary

This was a striking example of mobilisation on the part of the women. It demonstrates that women, many of whom were illiterate, are very capable of project development - analysing needs, accessing community resources, weighing up costs and benefits, balancing the respective demands of women and constraints of their social environment. These are skills lacking in many agency staff!. They had been particularly sensitive to some of the neediest of their community, and favoured poor widowed teachers,

They had not ignored the men of the community. The majority had already obtained 'permission' from husbands. A small number had deliberately not talked to their husbands, who were considered to be more conservative but likely to follow a well-supported initiative. A major factor would be the agency response. The group had also sought approval and support from influential male leaders of the community through a network of female relatives. They had, in terms of location especially, considered the points of resistance by conservative elements - male and female - of their own community.

The agency time taken up with this discussion was less than two hours. The CLO was a good facilitator, and was both firm and clear on what her agency could not do. She was less clear on what her agency might do. This particular project was conceived as an entry point to women in order to build trust - and this was the first time beneficiaries had mobilised themselves . As the agency has not yet considered how it might meet future demands, first approaches now have to be made to cooperating partners, with inevitable delays in time, and risk of failure to secure them. This has challenged the CLO credibility in the eyes of the women, and is undermining the newly found confidence of the beneficiaries.

Key points: Mobilisation of women

- The project was based upon a general analysis of women's situation in rural areas, and addressed a generalised view of women's needs and interests.
- Although not an ideal gender perspective, because it denied female participation in the initial community project and because the pre-selected assistance again denied female decision-making over their lives, the time-phased strategy brought benefits in this particular case.
- Key factors in favour of this were community cohesion, good relations firmly established with the female CLO, and the trust of the male leadership.

- The key lesson to learn is not to assume replicability. This case brought positive outcomes; the next one brought in fact brought immediate objections by women.
- Key lessons learned from the women's mobilisation is that they adopted a focussed challenge - targettting a feasible change to their lives, - but carefully observing the patriarchal values of the more conservative elements of their community. These they probably saw as likely to gain points of approval, and hence support.

Empowerment of women

Within Mazar city itself is the oldest example of a women's community project, which has expanded in several directions reflecting the diverse interests of the local urban women. It well illustrates what can be achieved with a great deal of commitment. The conceptual development of the women's community forum took three months; there are now four centres and two more proposed. The earliest centres are now self financing; the agency continues to provide advice and monitoring.

Case Study on Empowerment for women, Mazar-I-Sharif, Balkh province.

Within the urban environment of Mazar-i-Sharif is a well established network of women's community forums. Although the men initially claimed that women were 'too busy' to get involved in a water and sanitation project, under agency pressure they agreed that women should be consulted. The women produced different priorities.

Their ideas resulted in a women's forum, from where they could organise activities of interest to the women of the community. This has evolved into the current three-pronged model for the Forum including Production (carpets, garments, leatherwork, beauty parlours, other according to demand), Services (health clinic, library, kindergarten), and Training (maths, English, skills, per demand).

The three programmes operate under a tripartite management committee covering finance, logistics, and administration. This totals nine women at management level, who are selected by the community on the basis of experience against job descriptions. These women are directly involved in decision making, including the facilitation of community meetings. Through a regular programme of meetings, there is routine consultation with other forums, and support to set up a new forum elsewhere of the city. In this way their experience broadens, and their expertise is shared.

Although the women lead in their forums, the traditional male elders and *shura* are involved. Linkages are maintained between the *shura* and the Forum management committee. As one woman said 'even at the higher levels of society, it's difficult for men to ask women'. Never the less, one district *shura* has sent a representative to the women's forum to seek women's views on a proposed re-distribution of water from the reservoir. Much has been achieved in sixteen months!

Training courses require payment, which is used to successfully offset their costs. Production has thus far managed to meet the financial needs of its own and Services unit, but seems to depend greatly on the sale of a large carpet every six months.

Commentary

There is a strong sense of ownership by community women; they come and go even if not part of any activity, and lend *toshaks* and cushions for large meetings as if the centres were a neighbour's home!. In particular women appreciate having a 'safe' place to meet, and an accessible health service (which in one case includes a small maternity unit).

Many women have achieved the level of mobilisation; those at the top level are in control and their status as leaders in the female community is recognised by the senior community leadership of men. The confidence and authority of the women is apparent. They show poise, and pride in their work whether they are committee members or serving lunches. The management strategy of always training a deputy to ensure continuity helps this.

- direct observations of male/female interactions in offices, projects, and public places

- review of secondary sources, including project documents and reports. The plan, to review proposal and report on each project visited, proved impossible. This was because project documentation systems were not all systematically organised; in many cases both head offices and field offices claimed the other held the relevant documents, which were not available when requested. Finally, the team had to make do with a cross-section of project documents representing all sectors and agencies. Project staff were asked to describe their projects visited..

  UN and individual agency statements and reports on women's issues, gender strategies, human rights, mission statements and country strategies, were collected up and read during the first days.

All methods were piloted in the first field visit (Khost) . In rural areas it was found that male community members were not readily available for interviews while women were similarly engaged; most were busy in their fields. Advance communications were not always possible. For future field visits, it was decided to conduct male interviews in public places such as the mosque, *chai khana* (teashop)., or *hujra* (rural leader's community meeting place, usually for men only).

A total of around 500 women were interviewed in over 70 interviews, including female project beneficiaries, community members, and professional women. A summary of methods used is included in Table 1. Numbers of participants in semi-structured interviews fluctuated, and although estimated numbers of participants were recorded, the data presented are numbers of interviews held.

Table 1: Summary of methods employed per region

METHOD	CENTRE	EAST	CAPITAL	NORTH	WEST	SOUTH	TOTAL
FEMALE INTERVIEWS *	6	15	12	19	15	9	77
AGENCY MEETINGS	3	9	11	12	9	12	56
FOCUS GROUPS	2	2	1	2	1	-	8
WORKSHOPS:							9
Male only	1	1	-	-	1	1	
Female only	-	1	-	-	1	1	
Mixed	-	-	1	1	-	-	

*** Included meetings with 39 project/community groups, 32 agency groups, 6 family groups**

1.2.3 Project and interviewee selection

It had been anticipated that existing databases could be used to identify projects which directly targetted women and which directly benefitted women, by sector and by region. No database was

Briefing and observations left three major concerns. Financial sustainability is questionable. A major drawback is that products, and prices, are targetted at a tourist (expatriate) market. Locally this is minimal, and more distant outlets have not been explored. The forum financial expertise is limited, although principles and systems of financial control have been acquired. Professional input on small business management, including market development, might be a good investment.

These are 'community' forums, yet currently they meet the needs only of women. Men are not excluded; men train and take part in meetings, often alongside women. The fact that women appreciate freedom of movement and security suggests their preference for retaining separate services. To achieve gender equality - in the deprivation of war - a similar service could be provided for men. This idea is already under consideration.

As a model, it has limited potential for replication as it stands . This is a complex development calling for a wide range of local expertise. It needs education, and freedom of movement for women beyond their local kinship group, and sound public market potential which may be lacking throughout Afghanistan at present. Among major cities today, only Kabul is a possibility, where it would compete with the established women's associations.

Thus far no evaluation or impact assessment has been carried out; it would be particularly interesting to know more about the positive impact on women within the wider community.

Key points: Empowerment for women

- With appropriate approaches, it is possible to instigate change in Afghanistan's patriarchal attitudes and behaviour and achieve 'control' in the hands of women.
- This requires an understanding of gender issues.
- It calls for competent and committed female expatriate and national staff.
- It takes time. The project took 16 months in total to get the first forum established; its apparent success favoured the speedy establishment of others.
- It needs agency commitment including, in particular, human and financial resources.
- It needs local women with capacity to take on management roles.
- It needs an urban environment with a range of expertises and market opportunities to develop financial independence. Sustainability is fragile and needs particular attention.
- Replicability is limited in Afghanistan today, but as a model warrants sound documentation for the future and for the lessons to be learned on processes and arguments which might assist simpler small-town models.
- Empowerment of the female management team is discreet; its wider implications for the women in question could usefully be assessed.
- Impact on the lives of female users of the Forums, and of their communities would be valuable.
- In terms of interests, and in terms of daily behaviours, the women remain within the social norms.

Community interest in support for women

The case studies above detail the rare positive examples found of community approaches which have had 'higher level' benefits for women, beyond the distribution of welfare or provision of access. While lack of understanding and skills within agencies are substantially responsible and can be addressed once they are recognised, the willingness of communities - of men and of women - to accept female projects and programmes is also a key element of potential success. So also is the attitude of agency men.

Men's cooperation for assistance to women, and the women's keen interest, was much in evidence in rural areas visited by the team in Laghman, Nangarhar, Paktia, Kabul, Balkh, Jowzjan and Herat provinces. Some of these women, in every case illiterate, spoke spontaneously with great feeling and with considerable affirmative noises from others present, about their condition and status.

We're not so stupid. We're concerned about women, especially about war. And we're not happy about it..

[Balkh Province: Dawlatabad woman]

Perhaps their expectations will be unrealised by the assistance provided, but they clearly indicated a readiness for change[9].

I'm tired of dependency...I want to decide for myself.

I want to expose the people to other, more advanced life styles... Look at us, we live like animals, with dirt and disease here. There's no clinic or doctor, no school... Why should we live like this - we have a right to more...

Herat Province: Ziarrat Jan village, young widow, and young wife]

Men too seem to be opening up to the potentialities of women's involvement in developing their country. Not all community leaders deny women's full participation in principle. One member of a northern rural rehabilitation *shura* (RRS) told us they did not object to women as leaders or decision makers - he cited Benazir Bhutto as a Muslim example. His more conservative elders, white bearded and turbanned mullahs, were more cautious. They agreed that women could usefully be involved in development of their community. They were not averse to having a female community group which could liaise via a spokeswoman with a *shura* member, provided she was dressed according to Islam, meaning a *burkha* (worn by a majority of the local women, though a few older women will wear only a large *chadar*). (On a first encounter, we did not pursue the discussion so far as to ask what would happen if women disagreed with men.)

The problem they saw was a lack of women with education and leadership skills who could constructively direct such a group. This was echoed by a number of community women. The community had fairly recently just completed construction of a girls' school - then discovered it lacked female teachers.

The elders gave female leadership some thought and then suggested that they possibly did have one woman in the community who might be satisfactory. They expressed interest in information that a Women's Council had just been established in Mazar, and decided that they should send someome (a journey of around three hours on a rough road) to find out more. The 'someone' would be a man, who would first approach an authority office to check out the Council.

It would be easy to be sceptical about this discourse, which took place without prior briefing as to its purpose, or to dismiss it as a solitary example. This would be hasty. Female committees have received initial approval in an eastern province, and in two other districts of Balkh Province we learned that a female counterpart to the local *shura* has been proposed, possibly using agency male and female staff initially as the channel of communication between them. With the right sort of support, the idea may readily be brought to fruition here. There is an institutional model which might be used as a positive influence. The Social Affairs department has a female division, with its own female head of department and staff. This is segregated (yes, in Mazar too) in terms of office location from its male equivalent, although senior male and female staff do meet together to share common interests and planning. Such initiatives may be small but in the current conservative climate, they are meaningful.

In the regional workshops, project staff highlighted the community approach as an effective means of reaching women. Key reasons were that it gave opportunity to develop and build trust, perhaps initially with men through a 'community' project. Participants also considered major opportunities to come from community demand and cooperation. Key influences of change are considered to be

[9] This readiness for change does not imply that anything will do - women have clear ideas about what they want, and what is responsible on the part of agencies. This is discussed in chapter four.

economic pressures, returnees and internally displaced who bring broader experiences and expectations.

The team was particularly impressed by the attitude of some male project staff of UN, NGO and government agencies who contributed to workshops and general discussions. They firmly recognised a need to involve women in Afghanistan's reconstruction, and were willing to work alongside and support female colleagues. Most felt that the absence of female staff was a major weakness in their agencies, in some cases recognising that female colleagues should be involved in the 'male' oriented community projects, and at management (decision making) level. They are allies within our agencies, and their support needs to be encouraged.

Key points: Community opportunities for women

- Women - as well as men - recognise the low quality of life endured by the whole community, and are keen to have change.
- Many women are willing to participate in, and contribute whatever they can to bring about changes. By recognising their own inadequacies due to lack of education, they are aware of their disadvantage compared to many men.
- Men - as community leaders - are beginning to acknowledge that women's involvement is valuable and are opening up to opportunities for women, provided they are within social norms.
- Agency men acknowledge a key role for female colleagues, to provide a female counterpart to their own activities and at more senior decision-making levels.

3.3 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT WOMEN

As political authorities in most regions of Afghanistan have compounded existing socio-cultural constraints on women, it is increasingly important to look at how agencies are responding. Limitations on sectors of paid work open to women and the imposed segregation of their employment even from male colleagues have had major impact on assistance for women (see chapter 2), notably in urban areas. The cities of Jalalabad, Kandahar and Herat have been the most affected, with the former restricting women to health and education, and the latter two to health alone and even denying education to all girls.

Three clear strategies have emerged from agencies working in these cities - defeatism, adaptation, and advocacy. The substance of each in terms of its aim, justification, implementation adjustments, and staffing are summarised in Table 8.

Mandates or assistance

The one aspect of commonality between all strategies is the recognition of a need for ongoing dialogue with authorities. For many this is painstaking taking effort in order to achieve some compromise of the restrictions in order to maintain current opportunities for women. These agencies believe that to protest in terms of women's rights is confrontational and may invite further restrictions on women. They see their key purpose of being here as the provision of humanitarian support, not advocacy[10], and efforts should focus on keeping the channels of access open.

This has brought results for individual agencies. They have obtained approval for what is officially forbidden, and their women's projects continue. Although no new opportunities are created,

[10] A previous study (*'Female Human Rights in Afghanistan: Issues and Options for Bilateral Donors'*, May 1996: Islamabad, Bilateral Donors Working Group/C A Le Duc) found that 'the majority [79%] of respondents [UN and NGO agency heads, bilateral donors, members of Advisory Group to the UN on Gender]believe that it is important to have a policy on women, but they do not believe that this should take precedence over their shared objective to deliver assistance'.

existing ones are maintained - at least until the approving authority changes its mind, or its representative. The success of dialogue depends upon individual personality, commitment, skill and patience in negotiations, and time spent on the task. Costs and benefits to the agency programme need careful balancing.

A very small number of UN and NGO agencies claim to have a specific mandate to defend female human rights, and have adopted advocacy strategies. This has meant suspension of their related support projects until such time as the provincial authorities re-instate female rights of access to education and employment. Dialogue is maintained to see if the authority position, through persuasion and reasoning, can be changed. To date it has not.

The potential benefit of defending rights is that a positive outcome is for all, not only for the defending agency; that it is for a substantial period, not short-term; that it is a matter of principle, rather than practice. The cost of defending rights is the loss of immediate opportunities.

A key component to the success of defending rights is that the message is clear, so that it is understood. It requires broad-based support - of all the UN and preferably also NGO agencies. This conveys the strength of the message. A third component is that the case needs to be made consistently: practice needs to match policy. This conveys the meaning of the message. A fourth component is that the case be made persistently. This conveys the sincerity of the message.

UN agencies find themselves in a difficult position. Through its Islamabad representatives, the UN does raise issues of women's rights with restrictive authorities, in the context of UN conventions and charters. At regional level, the task of representation is more complicated because local officers complain that they do not understand how mandates translate into operational practices. They claim there is no policy on women in Afghanistan which is collectively recognised within the UN family. Thus the message to be conveyed is not specific - and it is not understood by local authorities.

An exception is UNICEF's decision to withdraw support to boys' schools in areas where authorities deny equal access to girls. The consistency of this was planned: all UN agencies were to support the position. Now there are complaints among UN agency staff that in practice this is not so. Thus the case is not consistently applied, and the meaning of the message is not clear.

Sincerity is called to question because there is no apparent persistency. The task of representing human rights properly belongs to a separate UN agency which makes bi-annual short visits to Afghanistan. Islamabaad senior representatives have relatively limited chances to take on this additional role with already heavy workloads. Local representatives, where much of the responsibility ultimately falls because of the implementation implications, are hampered by the lack of clarity about the message, and the inconsistency of support.

Implementation adjustments

Implementation adjustments have substantially led to further rural outreach where Taliban influence is tenuous, and community based approaches which can build on established trust. The focus on 'safe' sectors, and home-based low profile programmes have also contributed to making these adjustments both feasible and successful in terms of maintaining support to women. Home-based projects may carry risk to individual families, which ought to be clarified between individual and agencies in terms of mutual risks, responsibilities, security measures, and compensations for any damage or losses.

Staffing implications

On staffing, there is a gulf between NGO and UN responses. The majority of the former having adopted adaptive approaches, have focussed on maintaining female work opportunities. Indirectly, additional women gain work as implementing partners. Female staff have been re-trained as 'health workers', capable of providing very basic education on household and family hygiene, or related to water supply. In many cases further skills upgrading is planned to ensure that capacities are of adequate standards.

Female staff have been given further assurances of their value to the organisation - and to th4e beneficiaries - by provision of office facilities acceptable to the authorities. Usually this is a segregated building (sometimes within the main office compound) with full office services. More unusually, female staff carry on working in a separate room within the main office (with agreement of the Taliban). The presence of expatriate female staff provide channels of communication with male colleagues and bosses, of expertise, and of moral support. Transport facilities from home to office, office to field, is provided, often at irregular but pre-arranged times and locations in order to protect identification of family homes. Staff are free to make independent arrangements if they prefer.

Impact on NGO and UN project performance

With these additional supports, many NGO female staff have continued to be effective. While they also deplore restrictions, their negative impact is considerably softened by what they view as supportive agency responses. In particular they value having expatriate women (whose workloads and pressures are increased). An aspect not always clearly addressed is where responsibility lies for risks to female staff and their family security, or to male staff who may also be punished.

Among the UN family, different approaches have been adopted, which result from their March 1996 decision to permit female staff to stay at home on full pay. The decision was based on the fact that many parties to it did not favour segregated offices, which were seen as violating principles of non-discrimination - a form of 'gender apartheid'. During the course of the study, this resistance appears to be weakening.

Among the few female UN staff, some work in total seclusion, while others make occasional visits to the office. Liaison with bosses and colleagues (all male) either does not happen except in notes, or is extremely intermittent. Most women make their own transport arrangements, in some cases for fear of authorities tracing the UN livery to their homes. Female expatriate support is very limited, being achieved in one case by visits from an officer based in another region and otherwise by visits form Pakistan based women. During the study a total of 14 UN expatriate women were supporting Afghanistan programmes (over two thirds from Pakistan) compared to over 70 men. As one newly appointed expatriate woman arrived to take up duty, no provision had been made to enable her to work alongside her Afghan female colleagues.

Clearly in such circumstances, effective work cannot be achieved at the planned rate. Numbers of beneficiaries have significantly reduced, and quality of service is in jeopardy. Cost-benefits equations can no longer be viable by usual standards, which impacts upon efficiency of projects and programmes.. Staff are very demoralised, and although segregated offices continue to be unacceptable to the UN, it is difficult to see how the present situation - working in segregation at home - differs. In these circumstances, ultimately the viability of UN female programming is in question.

Key points: Implementation strategies for women

- Three implementation strategies have been used in response to authority restrictions on women - defeatism, adaptation, and advocacy.
- All three have merits and demerits. Whereas many people view these, incorrectly, as 'one only' options, a strategy should be selected on the basis of which is most appropriate to deal with the particular problem within its context. Thus, there is room for all three.
- The UN family lacks a strong, clear and unified approach to gender issues in Afghanistan, which is understood by all.
- The absence of practical operational guidelines to translate policy into implementation practices hinders understanding, and therefore both representation and action by field-level officers.
- UN national female staff remain in an untenable position in which no adequate arrangements have been made to accommodate their essential work contribution. The existing policy of stay home on full pay denies rights to work, and is counterproductive to morale, and to reaching beneficiaries.
- UN support to women in Afghanistan and its credibility as a defender of women's rights-are presently being questioned - even by beneficiaries. This needs urgent response if the UN's mandate on gender equity in Afghanistan is not to be seriously undermined.

Table 8: Implementation strategies for women's projects in areas restricting women

STRATEGY	ADVOCACY	ADAPTIVE	DEFEATISM
Aim	To support female human rights	To maintain current opportunities for women - staff and beneficiaries	To wait and see how the political situation progresses
Justification	Consistent with agency mandates Consistent with international human rights charters and conventions In broad-based, long term interest of all Afghan women and girls	High risk that confrontation may invite more restrictions Primary objective is to continue humanitarian support Acceptable compromise of home government gender policies and HR in context of political uncertainty	To avoid hasty and inappropriate response Non-compliance with segregated offices which would compromise UN human rights principles
Implementation adjustments	Suspension of projects where females denied access equal to males Clear, strong, consistent message - no compromise Solicit support of UN/NGO agencies Maintain dialogue with authorities	Adopt community approaches Target rural areas Focus on permitted sectors Plan home-based low profile projects Maintain authority dialogue	Initially nil, or suspension of F. projects Later: Adopt community approaches Plan home-based low profile projects Maintain authority dialogue
Staffing	F. staff stay home on full pay F.staff suspended and terminated when decision made NGOs maintain F. expatriate support/liaison	Retrain female staff in health skills Provide segregated offices on site Provide alternative F. meeting place, + work from home Negotiate separate office in main office/agency share Provide F. transport facilities Employ F. expatriate staff for support/liaison with men	F staff stay home on full pay Gradual resumption of limited work from home Sub-contract to F. NGOs
Favoured by	UN/NGO agencies with specific female human rights mandate	NGOs	UN agencies as interim strategy
Region	Herat: all Taliban areas where girls denied education equal to boys	Herat, Jalalabad	Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad
Needs	Internal agency support + commitment Donor support Inter-agency support	Internal agency agreement + commitment Donor support Negotiation skills and patience Maturity, local language	Inter-agency support Clear, strong, consistent message on UN mandates Strong, committed representation with authorities
Outcome	Coherence between policy and practice Inter-agency support weakened over time or not given, reflecting lack of unified approach Impact on Taliban negligible UN agency blamed for negative spin-off on boys' (due to loss of F.teachers)	Generally effective in terms of its own aims Exception al permissions from authorities Staff morale and job security maintained for present	Nil to date - no change by authorities; no change for F staff stuck at home Negligible increase in F. expatriate support Extremely low staff morale Growing opinion that UN lacks commitment to women No confidence that clear, strong, consistent message has been delivered Increasing questions about UN position on F. human rights in Afghanistan
Risks	Contract review for under-employed F. staff Future funding, if position not changed Weak links in inter-agency support - already happening	Authority may change its mind, or its representative	Efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of UN F programmes in west, south and east must be questioned

3.4 FEMALE STAFF

As discussed in chapter two, the socio-cultural values throughout most of Afghanistan bring special considerations with respect to working with women. A key factor is having female resources, either within the agency or available for contract. As we have seen, women's behaviour is not only an individual matter; it is influenced or dictated by family, by society, and increasingly by politics. Women can not, even if they and their families are willing, easily travel around independently without attracting the undue attentions of others. Thus for female staff, there are particular considerations; these are magnified where they continue to work outside local authority restrictions, as happens in Taliban held areas. In the short term we cannot change these; rather we have to work around them if we are to achieve women's participation. If agencies seek to bring women into development, this before all else, means their own female staff to whom they need to give appropriate support in order to reach female beneficiaries.

From field visits and workshop data it is clear that one of the greatest weaknesses in our organisations is that proper - ie planned - recruitment of female resources has lagged significantly behind agency pressures to acquire female projects. It would be easy to conclude that the whole process of bringing women into development has been viewed as a necessary but inconvenient evil that has been dealt with too rapidly, superficially and at lowest possible cost.

All regions have female staff, plus female NGOs in Jalalabad and Kabul. Only Kabul and Mazar, the two more liberal cities, consider they have strengths in female technical and professional staff. Only Kabul, Herat and Kandahar believe they have specific budgets for female projects. This suggests that there is not enough funding in some regions to support adequate staffing; perhaps in the last two cities the available funding results from inability to spend planned budgets due to current political restrictions..

In all regions there is a view that there are insufficient female resources. These relate specifically to:

- insufficient quantities of female staff at field level, including technical, professional and management levels in all regions;

- insufficient quality of female staff: mentioned by agencies particularly in Khost, Jalalabad and Kabul, where training is sought to upgrade capacities in management, technical, professional areas including new approaches to teaching, and marketing;

- insufficient training opportunities and budgets - female staff are often bypassed (sometimes because of transport and accommodation problems);

- no female senior management representation to reinforce women's issues at senior level, meaning in agency head offices.

As has already been stated, women are keen to work but a majority similarly require skills upgrading. This is because aid offices and duties represent very different work opportunities from those historically undertaken by women (government departments). Without the bureaucracies which supported that type of work, the new opportunities present different challenges and require a wider range of skills.

Rather than focus on isolated difficulties, we include here a list of requirements for women to work within aid agencies. These are based upon first hand observations, reports from female staff, and personal experiences.

Key points: Female staff needs for effective work in Afghanistan

General

1 Access to a clearly defined job.
Women should not routinely be used as office secretaries, clerks, or tea makers unless this is their specified task.

2 The right to do the job for which contracted.
This means that relevant staff and resources be mobilised to facilitate her work; if there are insurmountable constraints, these must be addressed within a reasonable, short period. Months of delay are excessive.

3 Access to job targets, performance feedback and task reviews in line with changing circumstances and growth in the job.
A woman's job is no more static than a man's.

4 Access to female expatriate support for guidance and representation to male colleagues.

5 Access to office space, with facilities and services, equivalent to what is provided for male colleagues.

6 Access to office systems, plus knowledge on how to troubleshoot routine problems.

7 Access to office equipments, plus knowledge how to properly use and undertake basic troubleshooting.

8 Access to relevant training opportunities, equal to men.
Minority (of female staff) in number does not mean minority in need or interest; be creative if cost effectiveness is an issue.

9 Access to full office support services - of systems, equipments, materials, transport, without being treated as a second class staff member, incompetent, or nuisance value.

10 Access to colleagues, to share in all stages of projects within her specified job.

11 Access to knowledge - resource information and materials that relate to her situation as a working woman. There is a severe lack of 'women's' literature, or lack of it in the right place.

12 Access to wider female networks, within the region, and between regions - to broaden experience.

13 Right to be treated as an equal colleague, with proper respect, and to speak out when this is not the case - for example in staff meetings.
When women go to meetings with female colleagues, they are not shopping or gossiping - any more than men may be.

Female specific (but not unique to women)

14 Access to realistic security.
This does not require over-protection; nor does it permit obstruction. It means clear instructions to drivers, chowkidars, telephonists, on who/how/where/when men have access to women at work. These are efficiencies of communication and security, but have particular relevance to working women to cut out any unsolicited contact via the office.

15 Access to transport facilities - timely and courteously.
Whereas men are seen to demand, women are seen to have to plead - and are often left to last, or ignored.
Women's transport is more of a cultural requirement than men's so priorities need to be established.
Drivers also need to be sensitive to culturally appropriate seating arrangements - for national and international women.

16 Access to toilet facilities - in office (with sanitary disposal), and in travel.
It's a biological necessity, even if socially less acceptable for women to have to do so. On long journeys, only superwomen don't need to; it's harmful to the body not to. Drivers and pilots on regular routes should identify opportunities and notify passengers.

17 Access to food - in office, in field, and in travel.
Drivers need to be trained to be responsible for their passengers' welfare, including women's, as part of their job.
Where women cannot enter a restaurant for local cultural reasons, food can be brought to them if required.

Specifics for field based expatriate females in addition to above

18 Access to another expatriate female in all regional duty stations - no woman should find herself alone.

19 Access to transport facilities in non-work hours.
There appears to be a widespread (but unstated) policy of granting private use of agency vehicles on a priority basis to men - despite the social constraints on women going by foot. This enforces dependency on female colleagues which some do not like to request, and many men are too chauvinistic to offer.

20 Bunkers need to include women's sanitary items in their emergency support kits.

3.5 SUMMARY: Reaching out to women - planning, strategies and resources

Reaching women

- In general, aid agencies have made efforts to reach women within a context of complex cultural and political constraints. This has led assistance programmes, consciously or otherwise, to focus on quantitative rather than qualitative objectives. Two key weaknesses inhibit sound programming for women.
- There appears to be poor skills in project planning, with an over-emphasis on implementation stages and neglect of any sound assessment of the situation for women or reference to policy, unclear problem identification, poorly defined strategies of intervention and implementation, and lack of monitoring indicators and evaluation.
- A lack of understanding of gender analysis, tools, and methodology which would clarify many current oversights.
- For these reasons, it is unlikely that current assistance is having significant positive impact on women's lives, either in terms of material or of status gains.

Current position on policy and intervention strategies

- The UN family has a stated policy of gender equality, and an implied strategy of mainstreaming gender into all of its programmes.
- The policy is not well disseminated throughout all staff. The strategy is not at all understood, and urgently needs clearly defined and practical guidelines to address implementation issues at field level.
- The lack of a clear, consistent, and unified stand by the UN family considerably weakens its position. Ultra-conservative political authorities in Afghanistan fail to begin to grasp what all the fuss is about. Many beneficiaries, agency staff and even donors begin to query the credibility and sincerity of the UN position on women in Afghanistan.

Present programming strategies

- At programming level, virtually all agencies adopt a 'women's specific' approach to reaching women. Health and education agencies (the latter diminished because of Taliban denial of education ot girls) also depend upon 'parallel programming' which provides gender balance in terms of opportunity. A smaller number of agencies are now adopting community approaches, although many of these ignore women's participation on the false assumption that they can be, and are, adequately represented by men.
- Looked at more closely, the first two approaches can be seen to reinforce existing inequalities between men and women for reasons mainly relating to planning skills. The community approach as it is most often applied is gender blind, because it so completely ignores the role of women in its particular type of support. Yet it offers the greatest potential for women's involvement.
- There are rare positive examples of community approaches bringing benefits to women beyond welfare and access. These illustrate that women in Afghanistan can achieve participation, self mobilisation, and recognised influence in community decision making.

Possible implementation strategies

- Agency responses in Herat to the most stringent restrictions on women by the Taliban Movement illustrate three ways of approaching gender issues: defeatism, adaptation, or advocacy.
- Contrary to widely held perceptions that only one approach should be used, within a gender perspective there is room for all. Each would be selected on the basis of its appropriateness to deal with the particular gender issue being addressed.
- This again highlights the need for gender training to support staff 's capacities to develop projects and programmes which will bring material and social benefits to women.

Community interest: male support

- Both male leaders and community members are beginning to acknowledge that women should play a more active role; women are especially keen tor opportunities to develop themselves and to support their families and country.

able to adequately provide this information this. One key source produced a list of 17 'women's' projects for the whole of Afghanistan; luckily the team knew this to be too low.

The key problem was that the Reporting Guidelines provided by the UN are not sufficiently gender-sensitive; nor, it seems, do all agencies take the task of accurate reporting very seriously. The team found that a female literacy project might be reported under 'Women', but it could equally well be classified as 'Education', with or without a qualification of 'Non-Formal'. With optional choices, and without cross-referencing, it is not possible to obtain any accurate picture of support to women in Afghanistan.

Listing by sector also proved unsatisfactory since beneficiary data are not disaggregated by sex. The single data field of one key system has to be read in full to obtain details of beneficiaries, which includes both numbers, which are always given as primary rather than as secondary information, and sex. Ages are not recorded, so that 'women' may well include girls under 18 years of age who, in terms of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, are still children. If childhood is defined as ending at an earlier age for programming purposes, then this is not recorded or known.

The team compiled a list of projects per region which reflected all targetted areas of female programming interest, as well as each UN agency, bearing in mind the known limitations, to health only projects, in the west and south. Similar projects implemented by non-government organisations (NGOs) were identified for purposes of contrast. A summary of sectors by region visited is included in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of project sectors visited in each region

SECTOR	CENTRE	EAST	CAPITAL	NORTH	WEST	SOUTH
Income Generation/Loan Schemes	X	X	X	X	X	-
Food support	-	X	X	X	-	-
Education/Literacy	X - ch.	X	X	X	X	-
Animal Husbandry	X	X	-	X	-	-
Health: Education	-	X	X	X	X	X
TBA/Midwifery	-	X	X	-	-	-
MCH	-	-	-	-	X	X
Nutrition	-	-	X	-	X	-
Family Planning	-	-	-	-	X	-
Disability	-	X	-	-	-	X
Water & Sanitation	-	X	X	-	-	-

Two major categories of people were targetted for interviews. First, the women of Afghanistan, in urban and rural areas. Beneficiaries of projects together with female community members, were accessed through projects, ongoing or completed. Professional women from aid agencies or other sectors were identified wherever possible and interviewed individually or in groups. In the north, the two female team members held a group discussion with the male shura of a provincial town in Balkh Province, and with a small number of community men in Jowzjan Province. The second

- Male agency staff recognise the lack of female colleagues as a major hindrance to sound implementation of their own programes; many are supportive of the need to provide additional resources by way of office space, transport, and even her husband or brother to accompany her. Their focus is on compromise.

Rural focus

- Rural areas seem to be less constrained by politics, but more constrained by culture. Rural communities are the source of much present demand.

Female resources a major concern

- There are female resources available in Afghanistan - mainly in urban areas. There may be reservations about their quality - training needs to be provided; and their ability to travel without adequate support due to socio-political constraints. If these facilities are available, there are many women keen to work.
- A major weakness in agencies is insufficient and inadequately trained female resources. In particular women lack adequate female management, access to proper resources and facilities. Due to social constraints on women there are some specific needs, such as office space, transport, and communications.
- There is major need to address internal gender issues, some of which amount to quite serious sexual harassment.

Key lessons we have learned

- There is need for gender training to identify the specific disadvantages and tender appropriate solutions for disparities in women's condition or position in society.
- There is need for improved planning skills to support sound project and programme planning , implementation, and evaluation.
- Female staff are essential to reach women. In order to support and develop national staff, international women are also necessary.
- Time is needed to establish good relations with any community.
- Women themselves teach us to adopt adopt a focussed challenge on a feasible issue (ie start small), and implement within the social norms of female segregation and public modesty. This reinforces indications from several projects observations and interviews that there is need to maintain a balance between women's progress and men's status.

4 RELEVANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF PROJECTS: women's views

Thus far we have learned that in many cases assistance for women is provided from the top down.. So long as we do not ask women what they want, we are left with the question, 'Does our assistance meet with the needs and interests of women?' And does it benefit them? As explained in chapter three, fulfilling women's access or welfare needs are only first steps on the ladder to gender equality. We also need also to promote opportunity for women's choice and control over that support, and the confidence to be able to sustain it This is what we mean by her 'empowerment'.

Discussions with women provided information on the accessibility of the project in which they had participated, their involvement in its development and delivery, the benefits gained and their sustainability, and possible improvements. This chapter takes a closer look at current projects for women and, from the feedback they gave, highlights what appears to be relevant to women's interests and needs, and what is effective in changing their condition and status.

4.1 WOMEN'S HEALTH

4.1.1 Service provision

Probably the largest assistance sector addressing women in Afghanistan, health projects aim to meet needs associated with women's reproductive responsibilities both in the sense of her biological role as child-bearer, and her social role as key caretakers of children and the family (vaccination, nutrition, health and hygiene, disability). This convergence of sectoral and socio-cultural interests, makes health services appear less threatened by authority restrictions. This is incorrect: given the overall status of female education and the quantitative and qualitative deficiencies of qualified health practitioners, the health sector has sought to provide much needed capacity building and skills training (nursing, physiotherapy, prosthetics and orthotics, blind, deaf), community level management (traditional birth attendants, village health volunteers, disability support), basic health and hygiene, and specific disease prevention and management. This training can no longer be provided by men, and there are insufficient women - national or international - to bridge a gulf which has widened. Female surgeons, anaesthetists, dentists are virtually unknown.

While several of these projects could be presented within a gender perspective, they are often not explicitly presented as such; they assume a 'technical' position and omit the gender issue altogether.

Health programme and projects are essentially urban based - including smaller towns of the country such as Ghazni and Pul-i-Khumri, although rural outreach is being achieved in vaccination. In all regions, but not all provinces, there is linkage with the war torn remnants of an impoverished Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), particularly in the rehabilitation of mother/child health clinics and maternity facilities, supply of drugs, and employment or incentives for and capacity building - where possible - of its female (and male) staff.

Beyond the five major cities and in rural areas, female health facilities are very limited, if they exist at all. In some areas even traditional birth attendants (TBAs, known as *dahis)* are reported to be scarce, and not always considered to be adequate.

She's the only one in this village... and she can't do much for us. She just prays and asks for His help. We do that anyway. We need more ... [Woman in Uzbek village near Aqcha, Jowzjan Province.]

Key points: Health service provision

- Health services specifically addressing the physical and social reproductive roles of women are being re-established within major urban areas, but are not sufficiently developed to achieve any significant rural outreach, with the exception of vaccination.
- Although health services are permitted by all political authorities, restrictions on women's mobility and association severely limit very necessary training and capacity building.
- The devastation of national public health services, and the relatively low priority given to women's needs, is such that without the support of aid agencies, it is questionable whether health services specifically addressing the needs of women would presently exist in Afghanistan.

4.1.2 Human resources

Health is one of two (the other being education) major sectors which offers socially accepted employment opportunities to women. In the major cities of the country the breakdown of MoPH has left a residual pool of female staff with basic, if not sufficient, health background, together with small numbers of qualified doctors (but no surgeons, or dentists).

In the restrictive Taliban areas of Herat and Kandahar health remains the only sphere of work open to women. Although modest numbers of female resources are available in these cities, not all are willing - or permitted by family - to work within the current climate. As described in chapter two, both work opportunities and service provision are severely limited by political restrictions. In contrast, in Jalalabad where women's sectoral employment has also been limited, health services are not so affected and many women continue with their private practices, and continue night-duty in women's hospitals.

According to twenty six MoPH male health workers attending a regional training course in Kandahar City, only six female medical or health employees are presently working in the four provinces of Uruzgan (one only), Helmand (four), Nimroz (one doctor working, two others at home), and Zabul (nil). They attributed this to the reduction in hospital visits because of inadequate or discontinued services, and a general lack of transport which prevented women travelling to seek help as well as female staff from journeying out to provide outreach service.

Key points: Health - human resources

- Within the major cities of the country there are very modest numbers of women with health and medical backgrounds. They need skills upgrading to support the present needs of health service rehabilitation and peri-urban/rural outreach.
- To work effectively, female staff in all regions need particular support, and especially so in Taliban areas (see chapter five). Many urban based, working women are willing to travel to rural areas if appropriate arrangements are made.

4.1.3 Women's needs and interests

Personal service

In urban areas women greatly appreciate the services they receive in MCH clinics or hospital facilities. They say over and over again that there is no other source of help exclusively for women. The implications of this are clearly that women prefer to make personal visits to discuss medical

concerns with female professionals, rather than be treated indirectly through the medium of medical advice sought by men.

Several women travel considerable distances from outlying areas to visit an urban clinic or hospital - always because no facility exists nearer to their homes. Thus village women also prefer to make an arduous journey of several hours to an urban facility, rather than depend upon a village 'pharmacist' or *hakim*. Constraints on undertaking such visits include insufficient numbers of women or children requiring medical help; availability of a man to travel with them; access to and cost of transport to make the journey. Women adopt a clear cost-benefits strategy to such visits.

> *We came four or five together, with the children. The cart costs a lot, Afs.50,000 but we share it so we can manage. One man came with us... he's a relative of her... We're all sick, but we had to wait till we were enough - it's too costly otherwise.*
> [Women attending clinic, Kandahar City]

In rural areas women give high priority to gynaecological support; they suffer from problems which they do not understand

> *This baby in my tummy is dead for three months. It's still there and won't come out...*
> [Woman of Aqcha, Jowzjan province.]

and about which it is unlikely they would consult men. They complain of an absence of local advice, and the expense of making urban visits. Unless they are visibly suffering and failing to fulfil their usual roles, it seems that such trips are difficult to justify. Their personal conditions seem to take precedence over child vaccination.

Women do not discuss details of their intimate medical concerns with their husbands. In particular gynaecological problems, even those associated exclusively with pregnancy or post-partum of much sought-after children, are avoided by custom. This does not imply that men do not care about their womenfolk; rather that the traditional absence of familiarity between men and women, plus the widespread lack of knowledge about how the body works, inhibit such exchanges.[1] Women within the family may - but do not always - share health concerns, in response to which they will proffer a variety of traditional remedies. Thus the true nature of the problem can easily be concealed, and preventive treatments so delayed that curative action becomes necessary.

Preventive care

Some agencies have developed strategies to enhance preventive care. One approach has been to deliver the first stages of vaccination as an outreach mobile service, but demanding that the final stage be administered in an urban clinic. This is **to encourage clinic attendance** - albeit often at cost to the women - where they can see, and learn from others, the benefits to be gained by professional medical care. Several women indicated that this was how they first came to a clinic, which they now routinely attend. They now come not only for reproductive support, but also with other concerns.

A second approach, to improve reproductive health and management of at-risk pregnancies, is **via community services**. In Kabul community based professional midwives (not TBAs) provide a home-based service to pregnant women identified by house surveys. This aims to reduce

[1]1. These boundaries of communication may be crossed by more affluent women who may seek out highly respected, top class male medical practitioners; these cases are increasingly rare as such men have left the country and new opportunities have not bred such reputable replacements.

pressure on local clinics, and on the specialised facilities of the city, enabling each to concentrate on other needs. The midwives, who work in pairs, are readily identified within their communities by an outdoor 'uniform' (dark green *hejab* and black *chadar*). This identification gives the women additional protection from social pressures (as well as some very dirty outdoor work conditions), and enhances the respect they are earning by their work. Access to a home service is much appreciated by the beneficiaries. They successfully promote it to neighbours, many of whom are similarly denied the opportunity for quality care due to economic pressures within the family, or strict *purdah* demanded by husbands[2].

House-based training - usually in specific topics such as diarrhoea or malaria control - has also met with great success in terms of interest and value to women. They feel proud that they have learned some practical measures, and say that illnesses have reduced. In particular they are happy to have reduced expenditure on medicines. This also reduces the burden on men to find cash for payment.

Health centres have an advantage in that they can rapidly respond to newly perceived female (or child) health risks, such as malnutrition, or introduce broader based preventive strategies, such as general health and hygiene practices. These are often presented as **information services**, delivered to groups of women while they wait for other medical attention to themselves or their children. But disruption to attend the doctor, distractions of attendant children, and short duration of the information all contribute to what seems likely to be relatively ineffective benefit to the target group. Even if interested, it is unlikely that women have the opportunity to return to enhance their knowledge. Arguably they serve to raise awareness in women; they might, if so designed, provide a measure of interest in some 'new' support. But without such an objective, and measurable activity to achieve it, all that can be reported is a guesstimate of the number of women who gave transitory attention to the training. Project efficiency and effectiveness need careful thought.

Key points: Health - women's needs and interests

- In both urban and rural areas women want reproductive health services which give them direct contact with female medical and health practitioners.
- Many women can not, and do not, discuss intimate female problems with men; sensitive communications are not helped by the lack of knowledge of basic biology among men as well as eomen.
- Information on preventive health measures, particularly those which reduce medicine costs, are much appreciated.
- Community level, home based information provides good opportunities for women to meet together as well as to learn, and appears more effective than clinic-based group information delivery which is subjected to disruption and distraction.
- Strategies to encourage women to use urban services is to insist on delivering second vaccinations in urban clinics rather than in the community, and providing home-based services with linkages to higher-order professional services. From women's feedback, such strategies raise their awareness, and their participation. Constraints on clinic attendance are costs of transport, availability of sufficient people to share costs, and male guardian. Men sometimes deny women permission to obtain necessary 'next-level' assistance - to the cost of life.

4.1.4 Women's participation

Health concerns are frequently identified by agencies as a basic need of women; in fact access to good health is a basic right of all people. Services delivered to women in the capacity of her social

2 Even within the capital city, observance of *purdah* can deprive a woman of access to proper maternity care. Women, and infants, die as a result.

role as family caretaker (rather than her biological role as bearer of children) often appear to be given as a convenient way of reaching women within communities in order to comply with agency objectives of 'bringing women into development'. While they undoubtedly provide increased access, they might - if analysed from a gender perspective - address a specific gender issue, arising from disparities between male and female. This is not in evidence, perhaps because there is insufficient information about the local community being served. It represents a wasted opportunity to raise awareness - in a non-confrontational way - of women's condition and social position; it also ignores what women themselves might want, which may differ from what the agency gives.

Constraints

Health services, even those specifically targetted at women, generally do not involve women in planning. They are rehabilitated facilities that once existed within a national public health service. Their centralised nature has both positive and negative points for women.

Some agencies involve women in developing new more specialised services, thereby giving them a degree of influence. But this can create disparities in services available in different clinics within the same town. Some women then complain about this, particularly if they are unable to attend elsewhere due to cost of travel, restrictions on their mobility, or security.

Diversification may also carry risk to sustainability. Ultimately most clinics are intended to revert to management by a public health ministry who may in future find it difficult to stop a service to which women have become accustomed. Such action may be necessary if confronted with broader based needs and limited financial resources. Agencies have to consider carefully when planning their service and how it might better involve women with a sustainable benefit.

Meeting women's needs

Hospital clinics have greater autonomy and some have encouraged women to ask for additional services that interest them.

Case Study on meeting women's needs, Herat City.

An urban clinic has provided support on family spacing in response to women's repeated requests. Their need, women explained, arose out of the economic pressures they already experience, or fear in the future, which prevent adequate feeding, clothing, and educating many children.

Women state that their husbands agreed with their initial enquiries, and are supportive of use of birth control methods. Indeed demand by men was increasing.[3] The reason that women, rather than men, sought such advice is partly because family size is considered to be within the wife's biological control and hence her responsibility; partly because husbands believe they lack any reliable advice - meaning both quality and confidentiality of information. Taliban, even more than traditional social values, considers any control over family size as un-Islamic. Women's health is viewed as 'private' and hence a safe place to expose such concerns.

Commentary

3. Expatriate men - and women - are frequently asked by Afghan men if they know reliable sources for information on birth control. They say they cannot risk asking locally because of strong social disapproval.

Family services have historically been available in Herat, but none of the women spoken to claimed to have known about or used such facilities in the past. Thus they represent new demand, and a vital step in women taking control over their own bodies.

This first step could be developed by encouraging women to share further their experiences and views on this topic, on female health in general, and on sexuality. Through story telling - which women in a group seem to do quite readily - topics of major concern to women might be introduced. These could include infertility, too many children, and violence, all of which were encountered in this study.

Group discussion can also provide major insights for health staff on women's ideas on how their bodies work, and the nature of their relationships with family men. Through raising confidence and awareness in women, group discussions may serve to enable women open doors at home to talk about subjects which presently seem difficult to do.

Although this project clearly meets women's needs, gender equality is not achieved because there is no information service for men. This need and interest of men should be addressed.

Opportunities and concerns

Community approaches have the potential to maximise women's participation, but thus far agencies have sought to have in hand something to offer. In northern Afghanistan a programme which has successfully implemented its particular human and animal health training in two villages, was initially strongly rejected by the women of a third village who perceived their needs rather differently. What they wanted was reproductive health support; they recognised the limitations of their only TBA. This illustrates that women can clearly identify their needs; it also shows that replicability - even within one part of a province - cannot be assumed.

The potential benefits of a trained TBA to women of a community is clear. The benefit to the trainee is not. Some projects justify TBA training as income generation for women, thereby 'bringing them into development'. This is rare: a TBA's work is undertaken as an act of faith, for which she does not necessarily receive even an in-kind reward from the poor families who depend upon her services, and probably nothing for the birth of a girl. Some trainees cherish an improbable and long-term expectation that in the future they may become employees of a reconstituted MoPH.

What good TBAs do seem to gain, though this is not formally recorded, is status in her community, particularly among the women, and over time they may become highly respected also by the menfolk. Agencies providing TBA training need to be clarify their objectives, expected outcomes, and indicators to support these. TBAs clearly represent an opportunity to influence attitudes to the sex of the new-born, and survival needs of women and infants.

Health education is an increasingly popular intervention, covering such issues as disease prevention, household hygiene, personal care, and environmental cleanliness - a catch-all training in preventive measures. It can be a valuable parallel programme for women when integrated with water and sanitation, immunisation of children, or latrine chlorination. Quite often it is delivered in isolation. Training materials are designed in apparent ignorance of the existence of similar courses, and it is not always based on the realities of women's current living conditions, or their educational level. Questions that agencies might usefully ask themselves could include 'How does this fit into the framework of knowledge by men, women and children?', 'Can we draw upon the existing resource materials rather than spend time and money on designing our own?' and 'What prevents us from involving the target beneficiaries in identifying issues and developing solutions that best meet their particular circumstances?'

Observations

Most health support is provided as emergency services, is focussed on improving access or welfare support of woman's reproductive role, and is financed by humanitarian/relief funds. Implementing agencies - although including many highly committed and professional staff - lack adequate 'technical' skills, management skills, and expertise in development or participatory approaches. Many services are meeting women's particular needs of her biological role; they ignore her social role. The widespread lack of gender analysis means that good opportunities are overlooked for enhancing women's participation and control, and of influencing attitudes of men in a non-confrontational way, by reference to immediate and tangible issues.

In rural areas, the service provided usually results from a pre-planned agency project as a means of achieving initial access to women because the agency wants to achieve gender balanced programmes. The agencies working in rural areas usually lack specific health expertise and thus choose a broad-based project, such as general health training. In itself this is not a familiar concept to rural people. It is therefore unlikely that it will match with women's priority needs or interests. Although its value may subsequently be appreciated, the initial entry to women can be more difficult and carries greater risks of failing in its objectives to win community confidence, to bring about women's participation, and achieve gender equality.

Reproductive and family health services appear to function in total segregation from disability services. While there may be operational justifications for this, more thought might be given to collaboration on resource materials and topics included in preventive family health. Messages concerning early identification of physical or mental abnormalities in child development may contribute to reducing later, irreparable, disabilities, and could be part of TBA and community health worker training.

A general observation of health centres is that they are not 'user friendly'; many women appear to be 'waiting to be found' rather than 'waiting for their (expected) turn'. The worst examples treat women like herd animals waiting for an inspection by some superior shepherd - far removed from an atmosphere of genuine (or professional) care and empowerment of women. Given the high rate of illiteracy, and the fact that few women have experience of unescorted expeditions, such a visit represents a challenging experience. It could be easier, enjoyable, and even enhance self esteem if women were facilitated in finding their own way.

Service 'mapping' could be achieved by displaying a colour illustration of each service - together with its name to encourage literacy - on the relevant door. Organised waiting areas could similarly be identified, and explained and monitored by the female chowkidar who is usually present and who could be appropriately trained (thereby enhancing her role and status). The factual, often visual, information posters on health issues that quite frequently are found inside treatment rooms - where they seem to provide reassurance to medical staff that they know their job - should be placed outside where they can provide information to the female patients. The fact that many women in literacy classes wanted to be able to find their way around medical facilities speaks to their sense of confusion or awe at clinic visits. And it represents an opportunity to enhance their status and self-esteem by making it more user friendly.

Key points Health - women's participation

- There is substantial demand by women for preventive female health support, supplied by women, in the forms of consultation, and of information.
- In urban areas health services are beginning to address wider needs and interests of women (nutrition, family spacing) because there is opportunity to identify and to respond to new demands. Outreach in urban areas is improving through a variety of strategies; these always need careful consideration of sustainable benefits.

- Similar support to peri-urban and rural areas is a major stated need that is not, as yet, being met.
- Opportunities exist for involvement of women beyond mere welfare and access (which results from 'technical service delivery') and could be realised with an understanding of gender analysis, closer attention to local contexts, and clear identification of approaches appropriate to the particular problem.
- To achieve the above, implementing staff need appropriate training, and time.

4.1.5 Summary: Health services for women

Women's needs and interests
The majority of women, both urban and rural,

- identify reproductive health care to be a priority need
- want treatment provided by professional female practitioners with whom they can have direct communications
- have particular interest in preventive family health training, especially that likely to reduce expenditure on medicines for children
- value home based, group training delivered by professional women; this conforms to traditional values, and allows women to meet together.

Service provision

- In rural areas there is little female health support.
- In central urban areas some health services are beginning to address the stated interests of women, but maintain a service delivery/welfare approach which denies real opportunity to develop women and change attitudes. This could be overcome by training implementing staff in gender analysis.
- Outreach strategies in urban areas are developing among which community level, house-based approaches are most welcomed by women.
- Although most agencies work through MoPH, there appears to be insufficient coordination on service provision. This leads to differences in types of services between urban districts within clinics all perceived to be 'MoPH'; if women know of them, they cannot necessarily travel due to *purdah* or costs. Strategies to overcome this need to be addressed, and might possibly consider coverage by a 'mobile' practitioners.
- Information resource materials for health training lack coordination on content, quality, relevance.
- Sustainability of services assumes a future rehabilitated MoPH, which is a long way off. This maintains both dependency, and women in a passive role. Gender responsive programming would help identify opportunities for increasing people's (women and men) control over some services, and realistically reducing MoPH role.
- Health services and disability services operate in segregation.

Women's participation

- Women are very rarely given opportunity for participation - and only at the level of identifying their needs.
- The lack of monitoring indicators, evaluation and impact assessment of health projects prevents observation of women's effectiveness in taking control of family health. If we are achieving any empowerment of women, neither we nor they know of it.
- Implementing staff need capacity building in order to develop creativity and confidence in identifying opportunities for women's involvement in all other stages of health service provision.
- Success stories warrant good documentation and some mechanism for dissemination to others.
- Gender bias exists in most services through the absence of relevant consideration of support for men. It was beyond this study to assess availability and costs of private services on which they might draw.

Human resources

- Limited female health resources exist in all urban regions, to contribute to low to mid-level programme requirements. There is a lack of high level female specialised professionals.

- Capacity building is essential to quality service provision, as are training in gender analysis, and participatory approaches to improve rural outreach.
- There is need for more international female specialists to support female capacity building at higher professional levels.

4.2 EDUCATION

Projects considered by the study within this sector focussed almost exclusively on adult literacy, considering health education or skills training within health or income generation sectors respectively. In addition, girls' education was explored only in Taliban held areas in the context of how people viewed its withdrawal, and current strategies to circumvent that fact.

4.2.1 Service provision

Literacy courses for women are most frequently included as an 'add-on' to another short-term project. Very often they are not long enough to provide measurable - or measured - benefit, and sometimes appear to be a strategy to extract more funding. In such cases, their value and interest to women is negligible. This was evidenced by the fact that although attending classes, women rarely draw attention to the literacy component; some explicitly question its value. This was particularly the case in the eastern region, and in many short-term projects which ranged from 2 weeks to 3 months..

Courses tied in to longer skills training periods - such as six months - and courses solely focussing on literacy are greatly appreciated. This was particularly so in the western rural areas where they defy Taliban restrictions. Two factors appear to contribute to this. First, the quality of teachers seems to be superior, and, second, the approaches were more participatory - whether or not this is the approach adopted to learning. This may result from historically better opportunities for women in the more developed western capital, Herat, than in the more conservative eastern capital, Jalalabad. Some of the teachers encountered in Herat had received further training in Iran.

Training materials vary considerably from very different basic (and possibly boring) readers to some impressively thoughtful texts - in Balkh and Jowzjan - with integrated messages on issues relevant to women's lives - such as health, mines, drugs, environment, and water - which provoke discussion and hence develop participation and group activity by the women. Even more than with health education projects, there seems to be little coordination, cooperation, or exchange of resource materials between agencies. 'Ownership' of texts often appears to take precedence over quality service provision.

A major criticism, also expressed by women themselves, is the lack of any follow-on resources in order to build upon their new literacy. An urban woman needs to capitalise upon and sustain her new independence. Such support might include helping women to develop their own guide's on 'how to' visit the doctor, and so on.

At the time of the study (August 1996) formal education for girls exists up to university level in the major urban centres of the east and north. In principle, this is also the case in the capital where it is less effective due to the total destruction of most material resources during mujahideen battles over Kabul, and the slow publication by the Ministry of Education of its revised school curricula. While young women continue to attend university, the lack of resources mean there is no effective learning in progress. A significant portion of assistance goes to the primary grades, often in the form of material inputs. As discussed in chapter 2, many girls drop out of education around eighth class, before formal graduation, because of the widespread custom of early marriage.

category included the male and female project staff providing direct or indirect assistance to women - with particular emphasis on implementing staff. These groups were chosen as they are the people who deal directly with the issues the study was to address, and because their voices are usually under-represented, or not heard at all.

Although in-field meetings were held with over fifty agencies, not all heads of agencies and coordinating bodies were interviewed as they had been the key informants on a similar study conducted by the team leader only three months earlier[8].

Table 3 shows the agency interests represented in the regional project visits and meetings. This includes cooperating partners, as well as agencies who fund but do not directly implement projects.

Table 3: Agency interests represented in regional project visits and meetings

LOCATION	UN AGENCIES	INT'L NGOS	NATIONAL NGOS	GOVERNMENT OFFICES, COORDINATING BODIES
KHOST	UNICEF UNOPS	CARE	NPO/RRAA	-
JALALABAD	UNICEF WFP WHO	HCI SGAA ERU	AABRAR AOGH AMRAN AWDA HDCAW WCSP	MoPUBLIC HEALTH DoEDUCATION
KABUL	UNCHS UNICEF WFP	ACTED CARE OXFAM SCF (US) TDH WFWP	-	ACBAR AWHA
MAZAR	UNCHS UNHCR UNICEF UNOPS WFP	IAM OXFAM SCF (US)	CCA NPO/RRAA OV	DoLITERACY DoSOCIAL AFFAIRS WOMEN'S COUNCIL
HERAT	UNICEF UNHCR UNOPS WHO	IAM DACAAR MDM	NPO/RRAA CHA	MOPH LITERACY
KANDAHAR	FAO UNHCR UNICEF UNOCHA UNOPS WHO WFP	HI ICRC	ART AWDS	SWABAC

[8] Commissioned by the Bilateral Donors Working Group, Islamabad. Report, '*Female Human Rights in Afghanistan: Issues and Options for Bilateral Donors*', May 1996.

Taliban areas show different patterns regarding female education. In the west and south, it is totally restricted[4] to a small number of madrassas which, through some versions of Q'ranic teaching do provide basic literacy and numeracy. Within the cities, determined women are slowly establishing clandestine home-based private classes for a monthly fee. The risk of discovery compounds the risk to sustainability due to the inevitable difficulties in obtaining teaching materials.

From Khost, approval has been given to individual agency's education programmes following persistent but non-critical dialogue. These include home-based primary education for boys and girls which are located in villages surrounding Khost and represent a first-time opportunity for girls; and in Ghazni, plans for rehabilitation of girls' only schools. No restrictions have thus far been imposed on teaching staff or texts women teach in the Khost programme; existing texts remain in use.

Key points: Education - service provision

- Most female literacy is offered as an 'add-on' activity to skills training; duration, teacher skills, content, and method of delivery are often unsatisfactory. As a result they fail to achieve literacy for women, and overlook good opportunity for supporting and developing women's personal growth.
- Specific literacy classes of at least six months give best chances of achieving female literacy. Participative methods and suitably skilled teachers are essential, and short specific training of existing teachers is strongly advised.
- Well-considered content addressing gender issues which arise in everyday life, plus participative methods to generate discussion, provide an excellent opportunity to support women to develop themselves. The same materials could usefully provide literacy training and gender awareness among youths.
- These benefits for women's development could be maximised by wider agency recognition of expertise, and resource sharing.

4.2.2 Human resources

Until the arrival of the Taliban, education was a major employment sector for women; it remains a socially acceptable one to the majority of urban and rural people around the country. In all areas, extant or former government departments have a supply of female teaching staff. In addition, qualified returnees from Pakistan and Iran increase the numbers of experienced teachers who now seek work.

The quality of these resources warrants tests and training appropriate to the proposed task. Teacher training institutions, especially in Afghanistan and Pakistan, have not necessarily provided adequate training even if political upheavals enabled women to formally graduate. Teaching methods are generally considered to be very old-fashioned and exclude all consideration of student participation. Such a tops-down approach is philosophically opposed to providing opportunities for student - women's - development within the learning context.

Key points: Education - human resources

- In all urban areas of the country there are reasonable numbers of female teachers seeking opportunities for work.
- Within distant rural areas qualified women will be rare. It may be possible to find competent women among returnees or displaced. A major consideration is whether or not they are sufficiently acceptable to the concerned community.

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[4] In Kandahar the authorities claim there is a fully functioning girls' school within the city limits; they have not permitted anyone to visit this.

- Caution is also needed to match, or provide training in, skills specific to the proposed training. This is essential if the project assumes participative learning.

4.2.3 Women's needs, interests, and participation

Becoming literate - the door to wider opportunities, or marriage

Both urban and rural women expressed particular interest in literacy projects and, from observation of classes in progress, appeared to enjoy the active participation which good materials and processes can offer.

Maybe it's good to be generally aware... [Woman of Mazar City]
I want to find my way around the city...If I can read I can go alone, without husband or children.
I leave my housework to come to the class - it's for my future.
Maybe I can read more books to learn more....
We can read wedding cards...
It will help us to find work.
I want to be literate...this is like being blind. I can make my own decisions if I can read.
[Women of Toorkla village, near Deh Dadi, Balkh province.]

In this region it is difficult to establish whether the source of interest arose from women themselves, or whether it has been initiated by the local government's recent interest in women's human rights. The regional female Department of Social Affairs views literacy and education as a key priority in women's development[5]. Their strategy is to provide home-based courses, using Q'ranic education - including *hadiths* and *ghazals* - as an entry point appropriate and acceptable to a conservative culture.

In Mazar City and nearby villages, as found elsewhere, beneficiaries almost exclusively comprise illiterate adolescent girls or young women. In several cases both younger and much older sisters were educated, perhaps an indication that these women missed out for reasons of prevailing political conflict or concerns about security. In contrast to the freedoms from dependency upon men implied by the women cited above, these young women anticipate that literacy will bring permanent ties with men in marriage. Many shyly admit that young men now seek educated girls as brides, 'because they make better life partners'. Parents may share this motive: many mothers apparently give up their personal opportunity in favour of their daughters; fathers agreed because it was all female and near to the home.

Educational training courses - increasing women's participation and control

Courses to fulfil informational or skills gaps for women within Afghanistan are relatively rare. Exceptions are those provided within Mazar City women's community forums where specific courses on English language, computer skills, financial management among others, result from demand by women themselves. The principle of community contribution to a requested service - which so many agencies say is impossible to achieve - is well demonstrated in this programme. The local community women makes the request, identifies its trainers, and students pay for their instruction.

5 This thrust has been initiated by the Dostum Jumbush-I-Milli alliance, controlling several northern provinces..

Skills enhancement courses for working women - in management, finance, computing - are proposed for Kabul, and for the south (for training in Quetta). Their realisation is ultimately contingent upon prevailing political constraints which may prevent women attending.

Training support for Afghan professional women - on leadership, communications, gender - is increasing, significantly through the initiatives of the Advisory Group to the UN on Gender. Well attended courses have thus far taken place in Islamabad and Peshawar, and in Jalalabad, Kabul and Mazar.

In all major cities of the country professional women noted the need for skills development to enable them achieve more. Human resource development within all agencies - UN and NGO, government departments and right down to communities (managing meetings? conflict resolution? PRA methods?), is clearly an area of need which has not yet been sufficiently funded.

Education - the only hope of future generations

In the west and south women rate education as a priority need, not for themselves but for their children. This takes precedence over their own health needs, poverty alleviation and, as they considered and discussed their present situation, over all other basic human rights. Their view was that ultimately education was the only solution to overcome the many problems they have experienced, and that the future - including peace - lies in the hands of the next generations.

The Taliban denial of opportunity to girls, and the negative impact on boys' schooling, is a source if bitter frustration, equally found among educated and illiterate women. Their lack of education did not limit their clear assessment of its impact.

Mothers' resentment of Taliban denial of female education

Poor and illiterate, as well as educated, women view the withdrawal of the right to proper education for children as an inconceivable and unnecessary denial:

- of hope, which has sustained so many for so long;
- of potential, for a new generation to develop in peace instead of war;
- of resources. to knowledge and skills to provide the basic needs of life for which many parents have had to struggle or have never had;
- of another future generation's potential for quality of life.

Key points: Education -women's needs, interests and participation

- Female literacy is one of the most empowering opportunities for many women in Afghanistan who see it as a key to greater independence and future opportunities. A major constraint is quality which could be overcome by inter-agency coordination. The relatively small number of serious agencies could make a longer-term contribution to Afghanistan's women (and men) by working together on a standard approach to include texts, process, duration, and assessment indicators of teachers and students.

- There is a serious lack of follow up support to newly literate women to apply or develop their skill, or maintain the group activity which women welcome as rare opportunities to meet together. This could be

achieved by strengthening group relations during initial training, and possibly facilitating ongoing meetings to exchange knowledge/prepare their own guides on understanding medical and health labelling, and so on.
- Professional women throughout the country express interest in their own development in order to better meet the needs of their work. Outreach mechanisms are not adequately developed or funded for appropriate training. All such training presently lacks proper job-related needs assessment, clear objectives, qualitative monitoring indicators and evaluation criteria. Without these, women's capacity building is seen as tokenism to women's development instead of committed professional support to serious female resources.
- Education, for children, is considered by women to be a priority in Taliban urban strongholds. Their strength of commitment to its importance is strongly evidenced by that fact that they say child education, as hope for the future, takes precedence over all other basic human rights of shelter, health, food and security.

4.2.4 Summary: Education for women

Women's needs, interests and participation

- Formal education of children is considered by women to be a key priority. This view is strongest in urban areas under Taliban authorities where it is seen as the only hope for future peace and development, and takes precedence over all other basic human rights.
- Even illiterate women now view education of girls as a high priority. This indicates a change in values for many; they do not want their daughters to repeat their own experiences.
- Literacy and numeracy are very highly valued by women both to meet practical needs and to achieve freedom from dependency on others.
- Literacy is used as an alternative to formal education for adolescent women who missed out on school..
- Professional women show great interest in further capacity building. Agencies need to be clear about the objectives of prospective training; needs assessments are advisable if aimed at improved work efficiency.
- Women are not generally involved in any stage of a literacy project cycle. Exceptions are emerging in community level projects in the northern region where such opportunities have demonstrated their valuable contribution to women's mobilisation [6].

Service provision

- Too many agencies include literacy training as an 'add-on' to skills training, without due consideration of its quality, duration, or impact on women. Most such cases appear to be a poor use of funds.
- Lack of coordination between agencies on resource materials and teaching methods undermines the positive benefits that might be achieved for women.
- Participative approaches to literacy training appear to give maximum benefits to women, including group interaction, thought and discussion on topical issues, confidence building.
- There is justifiable demand for follow-on resource materials; with facilitation, some of these might be created by women themselves.
- There is room for a lead agency to coordinate the relatively few committed agencies offering non-formal education, to develop a 'standard' curriculum, approach, indicators and possibly training which would make an excellent longer-term contribution to Afghanistan's (IL)literacy problem.

Human resources

- Female teachers and trainers are available in urban areas, and quite frequently also in rural villages.
- Skills need enhancing to achieve positive and sustainable impact..

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[6] This example is given in Chapter 3, Case study on women's mobilisation in Aqcha, Jowzjan Province.

4.3 INCOME GENERATION

The study included poultry training and animal husbandry within this sector on the grounds that while primary use may be intended for family food, most beneficiaries aim to sell at least what was surplus to family requirements. Many beneficiaries in fact sell first in order to have cash for staple food items such as tea, flour or rice, oil, sugar.

4.3.1 Service provision

Income generating projects cover a wide range of skills which Afghan women **traditionally** undertake, covering carpet and ghillim weaving, embroideries, tailoring and stitching, knitting and crochet, small leather goods (relatively new for women), poultry and livestock rearing, and domestic horticulture. Courses variously aim to provide training to women who lack expertise or to upgrade an existing skill by way of improved product, or its management. Relatively recent innovations have been food consumables, such as nan bread and macaroni manufacture.

A majority of these services are urban based throughout all regions, but are particularly prevalent in Jalalabad and Kabul where they have aimed to ameliorate severe economic hardships inflicted upon women by internal displacement, military conflicts in winter, or widowhood. Some rural outreach is being achieved; for the main part this is with food related projects. Projects are targetted at the most 'vulnerable' women who constitute widows, unsupported old, and the poorest. There is no standardised definition of 'vulnerable' and agencies vary considerably in selection criteria, and selection process.

Beneficiary selection

The 'poorest' is a term which is usually not defined and for which, as with the widows and old, criteria are often lacking in project proposals. Beneficiary selection for any assistance is fraught with difficulties; almost inevitably whoever finally assumes responsibility will be accused of nepotism, favouritism on basis of family relationships, political alliances, or ethnicity, or of corruption. Income generating projects are particularly susceptible to such accusations where there are material benefits involved by way of food-for-training, equipment or tools, or incentives. Many women alluded to or outrightly complained of this. In Kabul City, women claimed that even their *wakil* (local community representative) abused selection procedures, and they offered solutions.

> *All the agencies select their own people to get benefit...*
> *Women also are to blame as they have husbands but say they are widows.*
> *Sometimes poor families are more needy than widows...*
> *Internally displaced people have no connections so they get left out...*
> *House by house surveys are best., and check facts. Neighbours know best who is needy.*
> *Widows could have ID cards with photos.* (This idea was dropped after the women's ensuing discussion about why widows alone should have identification, be photographed, and so on.)
>
> [Women of Kabul City]

Local leaders as project facilitators

In the eastern region, both in urban and rural areas, the study team noted that some of the 'poorest' beneficiaries had more than one coop of poultry (and including hens, ducks, geese and even turkey) in their domestic compound. Various explanations for this came to mind. Either the women, whose houses were training venues, had been allowed to take part in and benefit from the project in return for their cooperation (a fact not included in project documents), together with widowed or poorer female relatives. This seemed questionable since the households belonged to

the local *malik* whose wife was not among the poorest women - and one wondered if his female relatives were either. Or these households had also benefitted from some previous similar project which had been held in the same locality. This questioned the quality of beneficiary selection.

A local leader is almost always the focal point of contact, and is often given the task of beneficiary selection. While this off-loads from the implementing agency the responsibility of making choices among women, it reinforces the power and prestige of the local, individual, leadership - and his opportunism if he is so inclined.

Within Afghan culture, reciprocity remains very strong; it is virtually impossible to accept a favour (his cooperation and use of house) without giving something in exchange. Thus it is very difficult to avoid including a female relative in a project to which he is contributing. But efforts can be made to limit their numbers, to select a poorer family representative (acceptable to him and key family members), and - in his interests which can be explained in terms of maintaining his reputation as a just man, putting his neediest people first - to ensure beneficiary selection by women of the wider community.

Duplication/repetition of assistance

In one of the villages discussed above, a stable and well integrated urban community, similar training had been provided around eighteen months previously. No current beneficiary or woman present claimed to know of this (nor could the implementing agency now be found in Jalalabad).

This suggested that skills and knowledge may not be transmitted between community women, although they had opportunity to meet; they said they were able freely to meet in each other's houses, and talked together in the evenings when collecting water from the local *karez*.

Multiple assistance

The study later learned that 'the poorest women' (not necessarily the same individuals) of this village were to receive training in kitchen gardening. The possible justifications for this raised several concerns for the study team. These are detailed here because they illustrate ways in which women's basic and status needs are intermixed, and how their best interests may be overlooked.

Case Study on kitchen gardening, in Sorkhrud, Jalalabad, Nangarhar province.

Need: As one of the most productive vegetable growing areas of the region, seasonal supplies are abundant and cheap. Thus we doubted if income generation could be a realistic objective; market competition would be too high. As a source of family food for poorer families, we wondered if vegetables were a priority need. The poorest probably spent whatever they had to buy basic vegetables; thus they could save this cost. But the poorest probably had a greater nutritional need for protein; thus chickens and eggs might be a more appropriate option. And in reality, the poorest would probably eat only bread and tea, and sell their vegetable product to gain a minimum cash return for substantial input of time and labour; more lucrative options must exist.

Interest: Are women interested in vegetable growing? Is this part of their traditional, productive, role? Do they do this themselves, or is it their sons? Should the boys be involved in the training? Do women have the time with the additional domestic chores resulting from war-damaged facilities? Do they have space? If yes to all these questions, what has stopped them doing so before now? Seeds are cheap, and a reliable vendor will have obtained these from a reliable, grower of an acknowledged quality product. Who does the marketing of the vegetables? Can this home-grown product compete with the existing market? What might be the reaction of present growers - who are probably men?

If one objective is to introduce new, hardier or disease resistant varieties, do they know this in advance? Do we know that taste and texture are acceptable to local palate and cooking techniques? Are the women convinced of this - and are their families?

Benefits: If the purpose of improving domestic food sources is to overcome poverty, we questioned whether poverty alleviation is most efficiently targetted at women, unless they are the household heads. Relevant questions would be 'What might men do that would bring (more) income into the family?' 'Is this likely to be more efficient in terms of labour input for cash benefit? In other words, are we **increasing** women's daily burden?

What are the real benefits for her; are we improving her access to food supplies (bearing in mind that women always eat last, after men and children)? Do we know that the energy she will gain from her increased food intake will exceed the energy she will expend on gardening? And, are we doing anything about collecting data to check this? We might include in this assessment her stress about her capacity to feed her family. This is not easily measured, but in present circumstances, finding enough food for the family, and fuel o cook it with, are major burdens for women.

Participation: This relates more to women's status needs, or 'empowerment'. Questions to be considered are whether women were involved in identifying the need in the first place - or was it an agency idea to which the local influential men agreed? And did women take part in deciding that vegetable growing was an appropriate and acceptable means of dealing with the need? And what was their part in selecting the vegetables that form part of the training?

Control: Within this village area we noted that domestic water supplies were provided by means of water channels from the local *karez*. The women said that the supply was not continuous; obviously there is some sort of timetable to meet the varying geographical locations fed from the *karez*. If women are to undertake kitchen gardening, they need reassurance that water is going to be available for this additional domestic need. They need to have some control over the availability of water. Minimally, their additional need requires recognition, and a clear line of communication to the *mehraboshi*, and those to whom he is responsible. Women's choice over what to sell and when, and how to use her income would then be additional factors which ought to contribute to her **control**.

Impact: Given the fact that poultry training has already been provided to poor women of this community (at least twice), greater potential impact for such women could be gained if the kitchen gardening was delivered to the same people, together with information on family nutrition, as a planned, integrated intervention achieved by agency coordination. This would optimise the opportunities for getting both quantity and quality of food, and for selling surplus. With vegetables to supplement poultry, there is greater likelihood that women could sell eggs which were found to be both scarce and costly in the city, at least during the study visit there. A condition of repeated support could be conditional support; for example, women receive the material benefit of the individual training course only after they have effectively shared that training with five others.

Support for serious poverty alleviation or improved family food supplies are worthy objectives. But it does not need to be targetted at women. Usually they have more than enough to do within their daily routines - and these are more demanding in the current circumstances of conflict aftermath. On the other hand, men are usually unemployed; virtually all the women talked to in Jalalabad said their husbands had no job, and no skills to attract opportunities of employment or selling services. Taking this situation at face value, it seemed that support for poverty alleviation might more usefully have been directed towards the men.

Funding agency criteria

Funding agencies seem to lack clear criteria for selection of projects they will support, or institutional history which they draw upon. Examples were found of the same intervention being supported in the same locality within eighteen months, by the same donor agency.

In addition, comparison of project documents showed that the same assistance can show enormous differences in quantities, costs, or timeframes for which there are no apparent explanations. Particular examples noted included identical costs, time, and material input for two groups of 300 and 1,700 beneficiaries within the same locality. In another case the same costs and time provided the same number of beneficiaries with 2 or 25 chicks for two projects implemented in the same locality at the same time of year. In such cases it is difficult not to conclude that funding agencies are more concerned with quantitative achievements in reaching women, than with qualitative improvements in reducing gender inequalities or women's empowerment.

Key points: Income generation - service provision

- Training or skills upgrading in traditional female crafts and skills is provided in most urban areas to provide income for vulnerable women. Due to Taliban denial of women's work opportunities in all but the health sector, this support is virtually totally depressed in the west, and opportunities[7] significantly reduced in east central provinces where restrictions are not so harshly observed. Activities are minimal in the south; aid programmes only began to establish themselves in the region shortly before Taliban emerged in October 1994. It is a dominant sectoral interest for female victims of military and seasonal pressures in Kabul City and its displaced population now overflowing Jalalabad, and crowding Mazar. Rural areas receive some support, mainly related to animal husbandry.
- Criteria for 'vulnerable' and 'poor' women have not been well defined; in some cases it appears to include almost all the women within a community.
- Local knowledge and access to a centralised database would avoid duplications of projects, repeated participations by beneficiaries; beneficiary selection needs wide representation by community women to overcome perceived favouritisms.
- Better skills of analysis are needed, both by funding and implementing agencies, to assess real relevance and benefit to women - to which gender training would make a valuable contribution.
- Income generation projects must rank high among the best intentioned but poorly conceived projects currently targetted towards women in Afghanistan. Observations indicate that they are approved, reproduced, and replicated without due consideration of the often stated objectives pertaining to the development of women, of the contextual situation, or of recognition of the realities of the social - gender - roles of men and women.

4.3.2 Human resources

Finding individuals with the relevant technical skill is generally not a major problem, particularly in urban areas. In rural areas it seems that the more professional expertises are most often found among internally displaced women from Kabul. While these women are very willing to work and to travel to rural areas, most will admit that it takes more time and effort for them to win the confidence of their communities. For some, it is the first time that they have experienced a rural life style; many view their current employments as valuable professional experience. In Herat, several of the trainers encountered were returnees from Iran, and brought to their task both fresh enthusiasm and ideas, and good quality resource materials.

Finding people with the capacity to teach others effectively is more difficult. Observations suggest that this is not given sufficient attention; human resource development would be a valuable input.

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7 'Opportunities' because the area had not greatly benefitted from women's programmes before the Taliban took control. It thus is an area of demand which cannot presently be met. Current projects are continuations of previously established ones.

Finding women with sufficient skill in assessing market opportunities is an unrecognised oversight in the income generation sector. Expertise is much needed, and a sound training course for competent implementing staff would be a major contribution. Financial management and costing skills are usually also deficient; training courses are needed.

Key point: Income generation - human resources

- Finding women with relevant technical skills is usually possible in urban areas; and sometimes possible in rural areas with displaced or returnees.
- Significant weaknesses are an ability to teach or train; costing and financial management; and particularly marketing.

4.3.3 Women's needs, interests and participation

Poverty alleviation

Poverty alleviation is a major concern of women in all regions of the country, and a priority in the east and capital. Whereas in Mazar, many young illiterate women replaced their mothers in skills training projects - notably tailoring - in order to improve their chances of marriage, women in Kabul and the eastern regions visited participated with the expectation that they could subsequently earn money in order to feed their families. No case was encountered where a woman said 'I'm saving to buy myself a ....'. Among wives (husbands living), a majority said their husbands were jobless.Thus, in Kabul and Jalalabad, projects are reaching a poor and needy group of women.

In previous chapters we have learned that men appear to be reducing their resistance to women taking part in activities - particularly group activities - outside the home. And that more are defending the opportunities taken by their wives to earn money - usually from within the home. Economic pressures are creating, slowly, a change in attitudes.

What we need to be sure of, is that this change is bringing about **positive** benefits for women. We want changes to reduce the inequalities between men and women, and build women's capacity for greater independence and control over their lives. Without this, we are not empowering women.

What benefits do women receive from income-generating training?

On the basis of this study alone, it is unrealistic to be conclusive about the benefits to women of income generation projects. Nor can we draw upon evaluation studies done on such projects; they are extremely rare. Project reports give quantitative data only, usually only of numbers of women trained and not of how much they are subsequently earning, or what they do with those earnings. More in depth information on individual cases is required to assess whether change has taken place, and what sort of changes, within particular families where women are income earners. But there are indications from the present data.

Quality of skills training

As the study was not an evaluation, present statements are based upon observation and discussion with beneficiaries. While they generally were proud of their newly acquired skills and achievements, we had reservations about the quality of end product on several tailoring projects. While it might be considered acceptable for family use, it certainly was not of a standard likely to earn income. Course duration - usually one month, 2-3 hours daily - seemed not to be sufficient, particularly for new learners. Several of this standard were seen in Jalalabad. Courses seen in Herat of 3 months produced excellent results; here the quality of trainers was particularly good with

a great deal of student participation and practice at measurement, sizing and pattern making. The teacher herself was a professional tailor, rather than a competent seamstress.

Embroidery work varied considerably in standard. While some excellent examples were seen in Mazar intended for both local and Peshawar markets, some disappointing work was seen in Kabul where previously the standards had a reputation for quality. As products - table cloths, napkins - are targetting a luxury market, it seemed unlikely that these would sell to a discerning buyer, particularly in the present economic situation.

Marketing

This was a particular concern, which goes beyond the quality of the product. In a previous chapter reference was made to the dependency upon external, rather than local, markets which usually puts the product at higher (expatriate) price in return for rare sales opportunities. These cases usually have a centralised collection or display point, provided by the agency and therefore sustaining dependency upon it. They do not all have the external market outlet which is essential to sustainability. Products which fell into this category included specialised carpets (silk but not traditional designs) and ghillims, leather bags and footwear

> *These are for tourists; Afghan women don't like the leather or the design.* [Leather bags, Jalalabad]
> *But the prices are much too high for local women; even ready-made from Iran is cheaper.* [Formal party wear, Mazar]
> *We don't know what people do with them, but they sometimes buy them.* [Bric-a-brac, Mazar.]

In the eastern region, where tailoring projects for widows looked likely to provide adequate skills, it seemed women needed to work long hours to cover their daily needs. Women quoted prices for stitching a simple shalwar suit at around Afs.10-15,000 and reckoned they might be able to produce three per day. They quoted their daily financial needs merely to provide the most basic food for their children and themselves at Afs.30-50,000. Women's fancy suits brought around Afs.50,000, but took much more time; as trainees the women were not prepared to commit themselves to whether they could complete one in a day.

Some of these women had formed a cooperative, and arranged themselves (through their trainer) a shop outlet in the city for piecework. A second group had arranged a contract for barber's bibs, but were not yet sure of the financial aspects. They were sole examples of initiative and achievement in seeking clear market opportunities.

Much more effort, and training, needs to go into marketing, and costing. Knowledge and experience of marketing are not generally found within aid agencies, and probably require external professional expertise organised to train several agencies at one time. Marketing skills need to become part of all income generating training projects. Even for local sales, improved opportunities seem necessary to ensure a reasonable and sustainable income. Current products rely significantly upon local markets which are often already flooded in urban areas, or sales of goods or services to neighbours, the extended family, often used for special occasion life events. These sales are in the hands of women, but family buyers often expect a favour, or offer a delayed service or payment which does not solve the woman's problem. As several women pointed out, '*If God is good, we can buy our bread.*'

While costings are now included on some courses, many women have difficulties because they are not numerate. Of those who had received some training on this, and understood the concepts, none costed in their own production time. The aim was to cover actual cash outlays without any firm idea of a margin of profit. Without this, they are clearly only filling in their days.

Notes: Unsuccessful efforts were made to reach FAO projects in Jalalabad and Mazar; UNDCP had not started its proposed new programme. UNCDAP wished to be excluded because it had an evaluation mission in-field during the same period.

1.3 TIMETABLE AND ITINERARY

1.3.1 Geographical range and timetable

As required by the terms of reference, the study covered the five regions of Afghanistan where the UN has major operational presence: in Jalalabad, Kabul, Mazar, Herat and Kandahar. Additionally the study included Khost and Gardez in Paktia Province because it was known that female non-health programmes, and girls' education, were ongoing with the approval of local Taliban authorities. Requests to include Badakhshan (north) and Hazarajat (centre) - two under-served but very needy areas of Afghanistan believed not to practice female seclusion so strongly - were not approved.

Particular efforts were made to reach rural communities who were considered likely to be more representative of Afghanistan's agrarian society than the urban dwellers of Jalalabad, Kabul, Mazar, Herat and Kandahar.

In total the team visited urban and rural communities in the eight provinces of Paktia, Nangarhar, Laghman, Kabul, Balkh, Jowzjan, and Herat, and women of Kandahar City. A complete itinerary is included in Annexe 3. All rural communities were within two-three hours' drive of provincial capitals, and cannot be considered typical of the more remote rural areas of the country.

The study was conducted between June and October 1996, including eight days lost mid-term due to team leader illness. The originally planned itinerary had to be revised at short notice due to security problems in Mazar-i-Sharif, public holidays, and the usual constraints of flight schedules.

1.3.2 Transportation

UN Salam air service was used to fly to Khost, to Jalalabad and onward to Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, and Herat and onward to Kandahar.

Road transport was provided by UN agencies within Jalalabad and to Laghman Province, within Kabul and to Deh Sabz district, within Mazar-i-Sharif, within Herat except weekends, and within Kandahar.

Because of UN shortages of vehicles, road transport was provided by an Afghan NGO within Khost and up to Gardez, from Mazar to Balkh and Jowzjan provinces (a two-day circuit), and within Herat for Saturday meetings. Their cooperation, usually requested at short notice, was an enriching lesson in Afghan crisis management - which extended to the provision of emergency accommodation and food; their support greatly enhanced access to valuable data.

1.3.3 Accommodation

Accommodation was a particular concern for an Afghan woman travelling without a male relative and through Taliban-held areas. Although the team was advised that UNICA guest houses are not an option for Afghan nationals, no alternative arrangements were offered or made. The option of using an NGO guest house poses cultural issues, and possibly risks, for NGOs as well as Afghan women because they are used by both men and women: each case needs to be individually assessed in terms of agency policies or views, and individual circumstances.

As men did most of the public marketing of women's end products and sold 'according to the market rate', it would seem advantageous to improve their capacities. Carpets are a particular case. While women have the manufacturing skills, in some families it is the men who own the animals, and hence the fleeces. Thus it is a family business. Men seem to sell 'passively', at times when the family have a particular need for large cash inputs. If they sold when their need is less urgent, they would probably increase their profit.

Sustainability

Much of the above concerning quality and marketing bear significantly upon the likelihood of women achieving opportunity for sustainable income. In addition, the training itself needs to provide the means of starting up her income generating activity. For most widows, and undoubtedly for other low economic status women, this is vital if they are ever to begin earning. Agencies have dealt with this problem in various ways.

Some provide reduced-price raw materials for a specified or unlimited period of time. This perpetuates dependency upon the agency, and may artificially make the product marketable. Sales need to be based on local costs and availability of inputs.

Some offer loan schemes in order to purchase start-up resources, which the women then repay from their earnings, or at a fixed rate over a given period of time. Some schemes are agency managed and, as above, maintain agency dependency. Others are managed as revolving loans by a group of women themselves, with control over who benefits, by how much and for how long; the initial capital is provided by the agency. These give good opportunities to women to achieve independent control over the financial aspects of her activity.

Some offer training with beneficiary contribution - in effect the trainee makes a financial contribution to her training. These courses exclude the neediest, but generate high level commitment and achieve good outcomes.

Some offer nothing at all, and are often supported by food-for-training. While in all cases the wheat is greatly appreciated by the beneficiaries, the majority complain that the course is unrealistic in that it does not help them to actually use their new skills. Many are sensible enough to realise that agencies cannot buy, say a sewing machine, for all; but they argue that although they are motivated to attend because of the wheat, they would be equally motivated if instead of wheat, its cash value went into a saving scheme for them so that at the end of the course they had 'saved' towards a purchase. Any balance needed could be given as a loan which they would pay back out of earnings.

Widows might be credited with creativity arising out of necessity; sadly agencies seem to be deaf to realistic needs and some practical solutions. Quick impact projects can, if not well considered, mean no impact projects; they may as well hand out the wheat ration and save themselves the headaches.

An additional aspect of sustainability which is not well considered is '**responsibility**'. There is responsibility to the beneficiary to whom an agency should clearly spell out likely outcomes of training courses. If courses are short, then maybe they can achieve nothing more than meeting basic family needs. But they must at least do that; two chicks is not a sustainable flock of either meat or eggs - particularly if they are not even sexed. Some base lines could easily be obtained from specialists on standardised training materials, on viable flock size, on correct volumes and frequencies of vaccines and of feedstuffs, plus link-ins to professional advice for ongoing veterinary support. Tailoring can target button replacements, repairs of tears, alterations (many people buy

second-hand clothes), cutting down to recycle fabric for child sizes, and creative use of left-over pieces. Feeding the family is essential; but this is subsistence, not income generation.

Responsibility should also be shown towards other agencies providing similar services. Ultimately everyone supposedly has a shared objective of providing assistance to women. There were several cases observed where two agencies offer the same income generating skill at adjacent locations. In one case trainees are making a financial contribution to their training course; in the second case they are receiving food-for-training. Both courses target the same beneficiary group. The first agency has worked very hard at successfully achieving control for and by women in sustainable training programmes; it is at great risk of losing women to short-term welfare benefits. One might argue that women must make their own assessment of their needs and interests, and choose for themselves. But where the weight of culture and tradition have denied that option to women, and where economic pressures are high, it seems a poor lesson to teach to women who have only just achieved a first. As aid agencies we can tighten up our cooperation and coordination towards achieving a common goal.

Key points: Income generation - women's needs, interests, and participation

- It seems that we are increasing women's burdens of work. They are using up whatever spare hours they previously had to practise their newly learned skills. They say that they start earlier in the morning so that they are free to attend training classes; they practise their skills in the afternoons (otherwise relatively free time) or late at night after all other daily chores are completed. Thus their free time seems to be absorbed; their rest/sleep time is eaten into. *We need records of women's daily activities before and after - or without and with - training.*
- We are transferring to women, from men, the responsibility as breadwinners. In almost all urban projects visited in the east and south, women's husbands were jobless, and wives were training in order to provide income for basic family food. For these families, poverty alleviation should include men.
- We do not know if these women gain improved access to food at home. It is unlikely that traditional norms of women eating last - and therefore least - have changed. So, while women may receive more as part of a general improvement in food supply, it seems improbable that there is change which puts her before or equal to men in food consumption. Thus we are probably not reducing inequalities between the genders. *[This needs in-depth questioning, observation, or recording techniques.]*
- Women seek income generation support, but are disappointed that it does not meet that objective, or offer sustainability. For married and widowed women, its primary purpose is to feed the family. For many, their project appears too often to be short of that target. It is a lifeline for unsupported widows; it is therefore vital that agencies get it right.
- Income generating courses do not always provide skills at a standard sufficient to achieve market sales. Low standards are not solely attributable to low performance. They relate to time for training, and quality of training.
- Marketing and costing aspects of income generation are most often overlooked, or not sufficiently based in realities of local circumstances and local practices to make product lines viable, or sustainable sources of income. External marketing expertise is necessary to provide training of agency staff.
- Application of skill post-training - in order to start gaining income - is often overlooked and a major source of criticism by beneficiaries. Various strategies are practiced to provide 'set-up' costs; impact assessment of income generation projects is essential.
- Beneficiary expectations need to be checked to ensure that they fit with realistic objectives of training courses.
- Agencies need to show greater respect for each others objectives and agree areas of commonality which are not mutually destructive.

4.3.4 Discussion on relevance of income generation projects to women

Many of the problems currently evident in income generation projects are outlined above, and may relate to wrong assumptions arising out of transferring successes and experiences from one culture to another without serious revue of the social context.

The philosophy behind income generation for women is that they can be brought into development by increasing their productive role, denied to them as a result of underdevelopment rather than of subordination by men. Thus the aim was that women should achieve their practical gender needs by increasing their productivity. In the case of Afghanistan, it is questionable that under-development is the appropriate explanation. Women's subordination has been, and continues to be, a major constraint on her everyday life.

In terms of income generation, women's opportunities are limited due to her own and much of society's limited knowledge and experience, and the fact that there is no developing economy into which to fit. Thus she is confined to traditional home crafts which are often given in exchange at life events, rather than sold for cash income. Traditional crafts have been perpetuated even in urban areas, such as Mazar, where women have been supported to assume control over decision making.

Poverty itself, increasingly experienced by families throughout all regions, but notably among those who have lost homes, has significantly limited food purchasing power. This impacts particularly negatively upon families who have had direct or indirect access (through extended families) to home grown, non-purchased, produce. As men too are without incomes, anything a woman can contribute is immediately swallowed up - literally. It does not contribute much - if at all - to her material needs. Whether in the longer term, women's capacities to make such significant contributions to their family's w ellbeing will gain them new respect, and hence status, is not yet possible to say. The potential is just dawning, as social and family values begin to crack (see chapter 2); but hangs in balance with challenge to men's status and the dignity with which he can let go of his honour, or obligation, to provide.

Documentary evidence is greatly needed to show what benefits women gain, and at what cost. Pending such evidence, all income generation projects need very thoughtful consideration and honest justification.

4.4 SUMMARY: RELEVANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF PROJECTS

Relevance to women

- Across urban and rural areas, the women who shared in this study rank their priority needs as:
    - reproductive health
    - education for their children, then literacy for themselves
    - poverty alleviation.
- Rural areas show reasonable unanimity in all regions on reproductive health.
- Urban areas show geographical differences, relating closely to their personal and very current experiences:
    - women of the east and capital want poverty alleviation;
    - women of the north want literacy;
    - women of west and south want education for their children in whom they see the only hope for peace.

    These come before all other basic human rights of shelter, sanitation, water supply, security.
- Assistance is addressing relevant sectors, particular in health.
- Assistance is not always the *most relevant* to women; agencies 'deliver' assistance on the basis of what they have to offer. Women's full participation in decision making about projects - at any stage - is rare. Thus support offered is far short of women's stated needs in terms of its particular focus. For example women primarily seek preventive reproductive health care, but receive a variety of other health-related services. Nor does assistance meet with women's interests in terms of numbers of women reached, and where. Whereas the majority of Afghanistan's women are in the rural areas of the country, the greater part of women's projects are in urban locations.

Effectiveness of projects

- In terms of effectiveness, the evidence cannot be conclusive since it was not a thorough evaluation.

  From documentation and observation, there is a lack of clear indicators, and processes of assessment beyond recording numbers of participants. [This is not unique to women's programming.]

  From what women say, it would be fair to conclude that the majority of projects are not as effective as they ought to be; the contents of this chapter are witness to this.

  From a gender perspective, current women's programming cannot be said to be effective. Improvement to women's condition is not considered in relation to men's, either before or after the project. Improvement to women's status is rarely a stated objective, and quite often is never addressed again on paper, or in reality. This reflects a widespread lack of understanding about gender issues and analysis.

Lessons learned

- Many important lessons have been learned; if taken seriously, and with gender training, there is much potential for improvement.
- Health services in particular neglect consideration of gender issues, treating all support as welfare service delivery. This has implications for sustainability as well as concerns for not addressing women's control over their own bodies. It is one of the most demanded and most necessary types of assistance for women.
- Non-formal education offers good potential of reducing the gender gap in rural areas, but only if curriculum and process are good. There is need to identify a leader agency, and standardise to provide a sound literacy package to Afghanistan. Follow-on readers, and activities need to be added. Within rural areas, there would be great value in providing literacy training for both adolescent girls and youths who missed out of formal education - and building mutual respect through appropriate resource materials, and exchange of views on given topics through a facilitator.
- Income generation as currently practised lacks vision. There is need to identify causes underlying need for income, and thereby re-classify potential beneficiaries and approaches to support. Skills training targetted at poor female headed households (widowed or married), needs considerably more thought given to types of products, quality of training, and effective means of marketing. For impoverished married women - whose husbands are jobless - assistance needs to consider opportunities for men rather than increase women's work, or identify ways of integrating joint efforts.
- All projects need thorough data to assess changes in women's condition and status for which monitoring indicators need to be identified. More information is needed on net profit after counting in women's labour,

and on what and by whom incomes are used. It is probable that many income generating activities are not cost effective, have limited cash market value, and actually increase women's burden of work. All need careful scrutiny before funding is agreed.

Service provision

- Considerable focus by agencies on achieving quantity of women reached, rather than quality of support being offered. As a first step in the complex socio-political context, this is understandable, but must be followed by serious efforts to achieve real benefitis to women's condition and position. Funding agencies also need to develop clear criteria, and assessment skills, for giving support.
- There are indications that some agencies are more concerned with their own sustainability, than with beneficiary access and control of services provided.
- Inconsistency in agency approaches within sectors of assistance undermines beneficiary trust, respect, and impact. This could be overcome by greater coordination and cooperation, and efforts to standardise or agree principles and guidelines.
- Agencies replicate projects on basis of ease of implementation, rather than on considerations of specific need or relevance to women within a particular context. Staff need better skills in communication and project identification.
- Current programming for women substantially focuses on levels of welfare or access (for which achievement is not well documented), rather than on their development. Women are maintained as passive recipients; men's high status is therefore being condoned.
- There is greater focus on urban areas, with limited rural outreach to women.
- Lots of money wasted on re-inventing resource materials that already exist.

Human resources

- There are female professional resources in urban areas; in rural areas they are rare but might be present among displaced or returnees.
- Many professional women need skills upgrading; ost women with education or skills need training in methods appropriate to the unstructured, under-resourced, and deprived women who are a very different target group from those of their original training.

5 INTERNAL OBSTACLES: barriers we can remove

This report started with an outline of the social, family, and political influences on the lives of women in Afghanistan. These are the factors which limit women's access to providers of assistance. In effect, they represent threats to our work. As factors outside our organisations, they are beyond our direct control. In the immediate term we cannot change them; but we need to recognise them and use that knowledge to see how best we might circumvent them, and influence them in order to improve the situation and position of women.

How we are presently going about those tasks in order to reach out to women was reviewed in chapter three. Issues of planning, strategies and resources were discussed and problem areas identified, which could be substantially improved by better planning skills, a sound understanding of gender analysis, and more female staff.

The relevance and effectiveness of present projects to women was examined through the views of the women met during the course of the study. A major observation was that projects for women most often treat them as passive beneficiaries of assistance, whereas many have very clear ideas of what they want. What they often lack, is the opportunity to express themselves. As agencies, we do not take time to establish rapport with them, and generate discussion to find out their views.

While the presently targetted sectors - health, education, and income generation - are relevant to women in that they match their interests, the specific type of assistance given does do not necessarily meet their real needs. This gap between needs and interests partly relates to 'not enough' - particularly in rural areas where women's support has not established good outreach. Much of the gulf relates to issues of effectiveness of our projects, on which the women contributed many valuable insights. These covered quality of projects (of trainers, of materials), a need for additional expertises and resources to ensure sustainability of new project skills (follow-on literacy materials, marketing expertise), greater consistency between agencies whose differences are meaningless to beneficiaries (food-for-training versus fee-for-training), of support for and representation of their interests (advocacy) to restrictive authorities, to the Peace Mission, and to the world beyond.

Although the use of SWOT as an analytic tool was new for most participants in the regional workshops, the principles of looking at organisational strengths and weaknesses within their organisations, and opportunities (or 'positive chances' - an easier concept to translate into Pushto and Dari) and threats from outside, ought to be within ready grasp of staff responsible for assessing, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating projects in the field.

A glance at Tables 5-8 (at the end of Chapter 3) will illustrate that staff showed limited self analysis: they were poorest at recognising their agency weaknesses. What they could see was problems with Resources - an issue most closely related to their work. But this limited view was not consistent. In looking at internal Strengths, and at external Opportunities (chances) and Threats, they raised many valuable points relating to Controls, Policies and Strategies. We considered that this poor capacity at self criticism resulted from a 'culture of success'. People under pressure are obliged to show positive results, in competition with others, fast, in order to maintain funding from head offices or external donors. This often denies the opportunity to recognise and confront weaknesses and failures; in fact lessons learned from 'what is going wrong' can be as valuable as 'what is going right'. These represent obstacles within our organisations; over these we have more control, and we are in a position to take action to remove them.

The insights gained from the workshops, observations at the point of service delivery and discussions in regional offices are represented here.

5.1 CONFLICTING INTERESTS

Current support for women in Afghanistan targets numbers of women reached, rather than quality of support. We are delivering a collection of projects which do not contribute to any common purpose and are not coordinated. It is rather like trying to build a house on the principle of laying bricks in a random horizontal pattern instead of vertical layers. One cause of this is that agencies operate individually rather than collectively. This has several negative effects.

5.1.1 Women's development is segregated from people's development

Women's development is generally treated as a separate component rather than considered as a vital element in every programme and project of an agency's national plan of intervention. In earlier parts of this report (3.2.3) we saw how women had been excluded from participation in a city water supply project, and noted that this is not unusual. If agencies are committed to the development of women - alongside the development of men - then this sort of omission should not occur.

A starting point is to broaden our focus from 'women in development' (WID) to people in development. If we talk of people, we mean communities comprising women and men; and in order to better understand how things are decided, used, or done in communities we need to know more about the social roles of women and men. In this report we have cited examples of projects where the overall quality of impact on women was undermined because it overlooked the role of men. 'Gender' is a term used to refer to those social roles. Thus we need to move from the narrow view of WID to 'gender and development' (GAD, in jargon). A wider concern with the interests of all people in the community - and how their inter-relate - may help to diffuse current sensitivity to exclusive talk about women.

Gender and development differs very little in principle from 'community development'. Whereas the latter aims to support people towards 'community empowerment', it is exactly because women so often are missed out of male dominated communities and support agencies, that gender analysis was developed as a specific way of supporting the process of 'women's empowerment'. The levels of empowerment outlined in a gender tool of analysis, such as the Women's Equality and Empowerment Framework (see 3.2.4) , are not only relevant to women achieving equality with men. They also reflect the process through which a community goes towards greater independence from governments or aid agencies, which is the aim of community empowerment

Although first examples in this report of women achieving higher levels of equality have come from community approaches because of their similarity in process, gender analysis is equally necessary to programmes limited to service delivery. These may operate more at the welfare level of benefit, but this does not mean that women cannot participate in or have control over that benefit. In a vaccination programme, influential women in the neighbourhood can be made responsible for social mobilisation to ensure all children are brought to vaccination, and for supporting (possibly with initial input from a more educated community member who may be a man) the creation and maintenance of their own records of which children have received vaccination and when. They are then in a position to ask why the next round has not turned up, and access that information via their networks to the vaccinators who are increasingly members of rural communities.

A gender tool such as WEEF acts as a sort of check list to help us analyse which level of equality is being addressed. It can be applied to a project, its objectives, or a country programme (see

Annexes 4--5), irrespective of how that project is being delivered. Thus gender analysis is as relevant to 'emergency' type service delivery as it is to 'development' community approaches.

Currently gender concepts and tools are outside many agency fields of knowledge, yet resisted by some individuals - often at high level - as impossible within the cultural and political context, or irrelevant to particular types of operations. The obstacle in fact is within; both gender training and a clearly defined gender strategy are necessary to ensure that the principles of gender equality that the UN stands for are upheld.

Key points: Women's development is segregated from people's development

- Women's development is a dimension of people's development and cannot be treated as a segregated concept - even if support projects need to take place in a segregated location.
- Gender analysis provides a means and tools of looking at women's needs and interests in relation to men's within the whole social context, and helps to direct assistance at the highest possible level of equality by appropriate means.
- Gender analysis is applicable within all forms of assistance, from service delivery to community participatory.

5.1.2 Agencies have diversified

In order to rapidly respond to current trends (often set by donors) to address women's development, several agencies have diversified; they have tagged 'women's issues' on to their particular field of expertise. Thus, for example, agencies which formerly focused on engineering are now involved in trying to meet women's interests in projects concerned with income generation, animal husbandry, or literacy courses for women. This very much reflects a view of development as activity (improving material resources), rather than process (improving human resources).

In most cases agencies have lacked appropriate expertise (gender awareness), resources (female staff), clearly defined approaches (intervention or implementation strategy), and aims (gender policy) which must underpin such expansion. These newly established units now compete with more experienced professional organisations. Thus diversification has increased the pool of agencies bidding for funding for women's development; in many cases it has decreased the quality of service women are likely to receive.

Key points: Agency diversification

- In seeking to reach women, agencies have diversified their interests beyond their capacities and expertises.
- With agency cooperation and coordination, specialisms could be maintained and quality input provided to beneficiaries. (This would improve some of the issues of effectiveness discussed in chapter four.)

5.1.3 Agencies are defensive

Agencies jealously guard their individual projects, seeking to stamp their own identity on resource materials (create anew, rather than draw upon what exists), on locations ('We are already meeting that need in the village; you should go elsewhere' - with no data to support this statement), on valuable contacts, and in particular on successes or failures. Valuable insights that agency staff may share with individual interviewers will rarely be aired in an inter-agency group meeting - even although the view, idea, or action is likely to be of great interest and value to others, and could contribute positively to their quality of work, and their understanding of the local situation.

The study observed that implementing staff were interested in - and in Mazar in particular well informed about - other projects, but appeared to have limited opportunities to meet together to

share ideas and concerns. They actively used the study workshops to share their experiences or - with humour - 'expose' each other. While some tense moments arose, they were manageable; important messages had been exchanged. They complained that their views were not taken on board by their superior officers. Internal communications appeared to be a weakness.

The awareness of field staff about what others are doing contrasted with the narrower view of their senior officers who, in general, seemed to be less informed or concerned about other agencies' activities, even within the same sector of interest.

Defensiveness may result from an agency's lack of self confidence; it may result from a widely felt concern that funding sources are reducing and competition is therefore higher. Individual agencies thus seek to optimise the chances of their own survival - at the expense of the more widespread positive impact achievable by open exchanges.

This is not a new problem, but efforts to improve coordination and cooperation must continue. Increased opportunities for sectoral group meetings to address specific issues might go some way to ameliorate the situation, including representatives from bilateral donors, UN, international NGO, national NGO, and 'government' agencies, plus coordinating bodies.

Key points: Agencies are defensive

- Communications about project concerns are weak, both vertically within agencies, and horizontally between agencies.
- A cause of this is 'the culture of success' whereby agencies try to maintain their superior position rather than spread the word and increase benefit to women.
- Greater transparency might be achieved by sectoral meetings around key issues, attended by all parties.

5.1.4 No coordinated policy on women in Afghanistan

Although the UN in Afghanistan has stated its policy on women as one of 'gender equality' (see 1.1), reference has been made throughout this report to the fact that many agencies and individuals within them seem unaware of this. As discussed in chapter 3.3 it is necessary to have a unified approach, and this needs to be translated into guidelines both at agency level (such as a shared strategy of gender mainstreaming), and at implementation level. These are essential to allow the UN agencies move from the present reactive position to a proactive position on gender issues. This is what is expected by donors, despite continued UN agency reticence[1], and it was strongly reinforced by the women of Afghanistan who look to the United Nations to represent their interests not only inside Afghanistan, but also to the international community.

The current lack of clear understanding of, or commitment to, a guiding principle substantially weakens the position of all. Head office agency representatives have no guidelines to offer their regional offices when requested which is a source of frustration to both.; as each new scenario develops, another round of meetings has to be called to discuss reaction. Regional agency representatives have no clear, strong, consistent message to communicate to local authorities, or to staff. For some the only possible response is 'no action' which looks like apathy and runs risk of discrediting what may be good but uncertain intentions.

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[1] Findings reported in 154-161, p.31 of Bilateral Donors Working Group/Le Duc, Report *'Female Human Rights in Afghanistan: Issues and Options for Bilateral Donors'*, May 1996.

The currently published guidelines are not related to the practicalities of field operations. For example with three cities in Afghanistan already in the control of authorities who restrict women[2], what should be the immediate response of UN agencies should a fourth find itself in the same position? Do female staff stay at home, on full salary, until further notice? (How long is 'further notice' and what rights to employment protection does this give a woman compared to her male colleagues?) Does the UN continue but provide transport to and from work to office for female staff if this has not previously existed? If women are prevented from attending offices, does the UN suspend all operations - male as well as female - to indicate its commitment to principles of equality? Do all UN regional agency heads request a meeting with the new authority to present a copy of its current plans, give a current status report, and advise them of its policies and practices? Do agency heads reinforce instructions to chowkidars about access to offices, ensure immediate communications between gate and building, and convey unambiguous instructions as to what chowkidars do if they gate control is ignored? At project level, can vaccination or water pumps installation be provided within a boys school in areas where education has been denied to girls? What is the response if requests for segregated female participation in decision making is denied by male community leaders?

Policy plus guidelines are essential in order to make proactive (which is not the same as confrontational) representation and start from a position of strength, rather than depend upon reactive crisis management, which takes time and allows varying conflicting messages to be transmitted.

Key points: No coordinated policy on women in Afghanistan

- Present policy of gender equality is not clearly transmitted throughout UN agencies at all levels (see comment on communications in 5.1.3 above). This needs to be repeated to achieve a unified approach.
- Practical guidelines are needed to explain how this policy translates into field-level practices in order to strengthen coherence between policy and practice., and to move to a proactive position of strength, rather than remain in a reactive position of uncertainty, or perceived apathy.

5.2 NEGATIVE ATTITUDES

This section takes a closer took at attitudes within agencies which prevent effective achievement of working with women. Observations and agency discussions revealed that there are many prejudices on key issues which indicate that minds are presently closed, so that communications and understanding cannot bring best possible outcomes. The three key areas of concern were prejudiced attitudes to women, to particular political authorities, and to poor communities.

5.2.1 Gender prejudice

A disturbingly high degree of chauvinism was evidence at all levels of organisations, among expatriate as well as national staff. Although not exclusive to them, much of this was observed within UN agencies where one might have expected principles of gender equality to have been absorbed at the operational level.

Organisational culture

United Nations agencies show significant degrees of gender insensitivity and set a particularly poor example to all to whom it seeks to impart the rectitude of equality between men and women.

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[2] Jalalabad, under control of the Nangarhar *Shura*, and Kandahar and Heart which are both under control of the Taliban Movement.

The team decided to make its own arrangements. With great appreciation to all concerned, these finally were as follows:

Khost:	Courtesy of an Afghan NGO with established female staff accommodation.
Jalalabad:	Spin Ghar Hotel, ground floor, behind permanently closed curtains. One tour of the garden produced an unprecedented number of 'gardeners'. One entry on foot was challenged by hotel security guards who clearly questioned the intentions of unaccompanied women[9] (See Chapter 2..2.1.)
Kabul:	Private arrangements with Afghan families.
Mazar:	Afghan woman - private arrangement; British woman - UNICEF guest house.
Dawlatabad:	Courtesy of an Afghan NGO, under mosquito nets in the garden of a widowed community mobiliser.
Herat:	Residence of a UN senior officer.
Kandahar:	UNHCR guest house.

1.4 PRESENTATION

This report makes no claims to give a comprehensive picture of the whole of Afghanistan. It is extremely limited in its coverage, and its content is based on 'snap-shot' experiences of the team members. ***It is therefore urged that the whole is viewed as indicative of what is, and of what might be.*** All programming decisions ought to be derived from a proper analysis of the current situation, and reviewed regularly enough to inform key planning stages.

It must also be pointed out the report lapses into rather loose references to 'the north', 'the east', or elsewhere. While efforts have been made to avoid this, there are times where it has been retained as an expedient to explanation or contrast of information obtained within the context of the study. It should not be assumed to imply uniformity throughout a geographical area. Urban areas refer to the cities mentioned; rural areas visited are defined by name in the annexed itinerary. For those who have never visited, it is difficult to convey the fact that realities can be very localised, and quite a different situation might prevail even in the next village. As already stated, good programming should be based upon a situation analysis, and not based - like so many are - on '----teen years of war ....'.

The report is divided into three parts. Part 1 provides the context in which the study was undertaken and how it was prepared. Part 2 details the substance of the findings, analysis and conclusions. Part 3 outlines recommendations and guidelines to improve future effectiveness in reaching women and meeting their needs.

Some explanation is required on presentation and style in Part 2. From the outset of this study, it was difficult to ignore the fact that the women of Afghanistan are viewed as 'an issue' - an epidemic problem rather like malaria, that we are obliged to address and, it must be said, bring under control.

The women of Afghanistan are already under control. Besides the various influences which shape their daily lives, or perhaps because of them, the women are wonderfully composed. Their sufferings are great - lives of loved ones lost, or irreparably damaged by severe injury; major disruption or total loss of home; the ongoing process of reproducing society; nurturing the sufferings of all others around them; the constant grind of providing basic sustenance today - and tomorrow - from invisible resources. The battles for death are played out by men; women have the responsibility for the battles of life.

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[9] Team leader was wearing a long coat - very similar to a *hejab* - and chaddar so that nationality was not apparent.

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLES

FIGURES

Provinces of
AFGHANISTAN

Legend

International border
Province border
KABUL Province name

TURKMENISTAN
UZBEKISTAN
TAJIKISTAN
TAJIKISTAN
CHINA
PAKISTAN
IRAN

JAWZJAN
BALKH
KUNDUZ
TAKHAR
BADAKHSHAN
SAMANGAN
FARYAB
BAGHLAN
SAR-E PUL
BADGHIS
BAMYAN
PARWAN
KAPISA
LAGHMAN
KONAR
HERAT
GHOR
WARDAK
KABUL
NANGARHAR
LOGAR
PAKTYA
CRUZGAN
GHAZNI
FARAH
PAKTEKA
ZABUL
KANDAHAR
NIMRUZ
HELMAND

Herat
Mazar
Aqcha
Jalalabad
Gardez
Khost
Kandahar

0 50 100 150 200 km.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study was commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme on the recommendation of the Advisory Group to the UN on Gender Issues in Afghanistan. It resulted from concern that Afghanistan's rehabilitation was achieving very limited participation by its women; the cultural seclusion of women was inhibiting agency fulfillment of UN mandates for gender equitable assistance. The main purposes of the study were to examine, analyse, and document current approaches to addressing the needs and interests of women, and to make recommendations and guidelines on how to maximise the effectiveness of UN and NGO programmes .

A British and an Afghan women travelled to nine provinces of Afghanistan, visiting urban and semi-rural communities in the east, centre, capital, north, west and south of the country between July and September 1996. Using semi-structured interviews, over 500 women contributed their views on support projects in health, education, income generation, The issues raised covered their needs and interests, the support they received, their involvement in the project, the benefits gained and household decision making. Additional information was sought from implementing staff through focus group discussions, and regional workshops. Input from non-aid professional women, and agency staff was obtained by informal discussion. The report is presented in three parts.

Part 1, of one chapter, provides the background to the study, its scope and methodology, timetable and itinerary. Part 2 documents the findings of the study organised into four chapters. Part 3 reports on overall conclusions, and presents its recommendations.

Part 2 has a three-fold aim: (a) to present the findings and preliminary analysis; (b) to introduce gender concepts for the benefit of those to whom these are new; and (c) to bring alive the unseen female half of the population that so many agency staff have never met.. This section contains substantial detail which may be of interest to implementing staff. For those who do not have the time for this, main issues are highlighted in Key Points at the end of each sub-section, and in each chapter Summary. Together with Part 3, these provide a comprehensive overview.

Chapter 2 covers the socio-political constraints which impede women's right or means of reaching the world beyond their essential domestic and household roles and responsibilities. Female seclusion women was found to be widespread throughout all areas visited, and permission of husbands or fathers required for any activity beyond their prescribed roles. Women's projects must operate within the social values of men - in segregation, with permissions, and with female implementers.

Urban : rural distinctions appear more valuable than regional or ethnic ones. This is most evident in the availability in cities of educated women from more liberal families who are rarely found among the largely illiterate rural or conservative urban communities. The essential contribution that these women make to women's programming is now severely reduced by the ever-increasing restrictions on women's employment which have been imposed by virtually all political authorities in Afghanistan, and stringently so by the most recently emerged Taliban Movement. They also form a vital link, through their personal ties with country cousins, into rural women's networks which are substantially limited by the traditional female role as makers and sustainers of families.

Conservatism appears to be a reaction to the sweeping and often insidious reforms introduced by the soviets to improve the position of women at the expense of core traditional values. Many men remain very sensitive to the motivations of outside agencies who express interest in women. Chapter 3 discusses planning, strategies and resources currently in use to support women. The present strategies of women's specific projects, parallel programming or community approaches, all enable agencies to reach out to women. But access to women does not automatically bring benefits to women. Improved skills are needed in project planning, and in gender analysis to clearly identify problems and solutions within the particular social context which can provide read benefit to women's condition and social position.

These need to be framed within a policy of gender equality, and a strategy of gender mainstreaming, which have already been recommended for UN agencies in Afghanistan, but are not well understood by the majority of agency personnel.. Field level staff in particular need these translated into practical guidelines to support field activities and decision making, and the UN family needs to adopt a unified approach to optimise every opportunity for women's participation in decision making.

This lack of appropriate skills and knowledge is substantially compounded by the fact that UN agencies have insufficient female staff who are essential within the cultural context to work with women. International women have more than a necessary technical or management support role to their national counterparts; they are the vital link between Afghan women now working from home or other segregated work place, and their male colleagues or bosses.

Rare positive examples exist of women gaining status benefits, beyond the usually targetted material benefits. These resulted from community approaches which considered both women and men. The particular achievements included women's participation in decision making about community needs, women mobilising themselves to solve their own problems, and women gaining control over female interests in community life and now consulted by male leadership. While none adopted a formal gender framework, they illustrate what is achievable within the social context.

Most significant are the lessons learned from close consideration of what women themselves chose to do. Although many are keen to change the balance of power, they do not directly challenge it; rather they work from within. Women remain very sensitive to men's core authority and the value they place upon gender segregation. They use their own networks to influence the former, and comply with the latter in terms of locations and, in the rural example, dress. This gives them the initial opportunities they seek - to meet in larger groups, to learn, and to gain confidence and capacities where these are lacking. These are essential building blocks to enable women 'grow ' and seek further steps to equality at their own rate.

Chapter 4 considers, through the views of the beneficiaries, whether our programmes are relevant to their needs and interests. Since the majority of women's projects result from agency (ill-informed) decisions on what is or is not appropriate, women are not always getting what they first want - though they appreciate all assistance. In this regard a particular oversight in all programming is women's psychological support. Widows, in particular, use projects for problem sharing and redefining their own new social status as women without men within a supportive group environment. This valuable function of group therapy for all women, who live relatively isolated lives and today do so in particularly stressful circumstances, needs to be recognised and reinforced.

In health, women want preventive reproductive health care; they want services provided by women to whom they can talk openly; they want much more than is available; they want it on their doorsteps, ie into rural areas, from where they have no transport, money, or freedom of choice to seek help when needed. They also appreciate knowledge about the prevention of common diseases in children - both to avoid loss of life, and expenses which they cannot afford. This is consistent throughout urban and rural areas. That these continue in Afghanistan as fundamental human rights of women and children, both in terms of survival and of development, scarcely need justification.

In education, above all women want access for their children - girls as well as boys - which they consider essential for future peace, and security of economic survival. In this regard, women are very clear that they want change; they do not want daughters to be illiterate, ignorant, and dependent, like themselves. This was strongest in areas where education is presently denied to girls, and in rural areas where it has previously scarcely existed for girls. For themselves, women appreciate literacy training in order to overcome their own dependency. They want more, including follow up resources and support to maintain and extend their skills. This was strongest in the north. Given the state of female literacy in the country, the relevance of education and literacy are not issues for debate; they too are fundamental human rights.

The relevance of income generation is less clear. Where projects are targetted at women who are sole wage earners for their families due to widowhood, or age or condition of their husbands, women appreciate skills training. But they

themselves are keenly aware of the need for this to be qualitatively sound, commercially viable, and needing skills and opportunities (numeracy, marketing, service networking) which are not easily realisable for women within the social or political environment. These are serious weaknesses in present projects.

While income generation is highly relevant to such women - indeed it is essential to their physical survival - if aid projects cannot seriously address the above issues of concern, then they must act responsibly and not provide the service rather than do harm by creating false hopes. For female sole family breadwinners - among whom are significant numbers of poor widows - efforts have to be directed not only at realisable material benefits, but also at their necessary concomitant shift to dual roles - as home makers and breadwinners - which requires support to build their status in the outside 'male' world. This security of status is an essential portion of benefit to these women, for whom the material benefit alone cannot equal her huge investment of labour, and all the associated risks to her children during her absence at work. In the prevailing political climate, this is an increasing challenge, but one which agencies cannot ignore.

The relevance of income generation projects to women who participate because husbands are jobless - usually internally displaced women - or to aged widows, is questionable. Poverty levels are such that people are desperate for family food. In many cases women are quite open that skills training is very secondary to the associated food aid. A number say that their working actually brings shame on their family, and is tolerated only because of the present situation; a few already recognise that 'when they go back home', they will not work because the family will want to resume its former social position. Many aged widows appear emotionally and psychologically devastated by the harsh reality that, contrary to life long expectations and to traditional/cultural/religious values, sons can no longer feed them. They are less likely to have the capacity to apply skills, even if they had the resources, although food aid is probably their key life-line. Poverty alleviation is essential; and this should also include the men and, in the most extreme case, also children..

On the basis of observations and what women reported, the effectiveness of most assistance projects for women is poor. The majority of projects aiming to 'bring women into development', in reality target benefit at the levels of welfare or access. This results from the fact that women are rarely asked what they want; agencies decide what is good for them and then continue to treat them as passive beneficiaries. Second, poor project planning skills hinder thorough problem identification, selection of appropriate strategies of implementation and any monitoring indicators of progress or success. Third, the lack of awareness of gender issues and skills in analysis mean that assistance does not clearly enough define disparities between women and men's access or control, and thus limits material benefits, and overlooks status benefits.

A further contributing factor is also an apparent lack of commitment to the problems of women, which results from the unfortunate convergence of a deeply patriarchal society and a patriarchal assistance network, among whom the sincere efforts of the enlightened few can readily be trampled by the critical mass of resistance.

Chapter 5 considers these obstacles within our organizations, over which we have control. These result from the fact that women are treated as an 'issue' distinct from all other assistance rather than as fifty per cent of the beneficiary community. In attempts to include women in their assistance programmes, many agencies have diversified their interests and are involved in new fields in which they have no technical expertise. This results from the often poor cooperation and coordination between assistance agencies, who are possessive and defensive about their work. An overall 'culture of success' denies recognition of 'projects that did not do so well' as valuable learning tools. Such weaknesses are not enhanced by the fact that many staff are now expected to undertake newly defined tasks, often reflecting a change from emergency to rehabilitation or development, and they have not been provided with training opportunities to equip them for their transition in communications, community liaison, participatory methods, or negotiating skills. Women in particular feel they are overlooked when training opportunities arise, often because accommodation or travel arrangements appropriate to their cultural environment are not considered, or are considered too troublesome to justify the effort. A wide perception of needs was for coordination of women's programming, with capacity for resourcing relevant information, for documenting success and failures, and sharing these, and for maintaining regional linkages.

A range of prejudicial attitudes prevail - against women, against particular political authorities, and against poor uneducated people. These all implicitly or explicitly indicate that people are valued differently - negatively - on the basis of their sex, their beliefs, and social status. They reflect in the commitment to the work to be done, in particular to its challenging nature, and they set particularly poor examples of what the United Nations' principles of non-discrimination stand for.

Part 3 provides the overall conclusions of the study in terms of outreach, relevance, effectiveness, best approaches, main obstacles, female networks, catalysts for change, and gender perspectives. It proposes an analytical framework of causes of gender discrimination against women. This might be used to record information at a local level in order to trace degrees of vulnerability of women, to identify 'unrecognised' problems (these being the ones not addressed by aid), and to check if assistance is coherently addressing the different levels of a given problem. The chapter concludes with three necessary conditions which need to be recognised with respect to programming for women - the need for flexibility within a changing conflict situation, the need to plan for continuing conservatism, and the need to make a commitment to gender responsive programming. These lead in to broad guidelines to promote women in Afghanistan, in which the United Nations agencies are asked to.:

- adopt, in a unified way, the principle of gender equality and a strategy of mainstreaming gender in all programmes and projects in Afghanistan;
- Implement gender equality within its own offices;
- support (but not direct) programming by an inter-related but separate advocacy strategy to be led by a specialised resident human rights representative;
- adopt a longer-term approach to support for women to enhance their growth and development;
- promote the integrity of the family with mother as its pivotal member.

Chapter 7 concludes the study with ten recommendations to strengthen programming for women's participation and benefit in assistance.

ROOM TO MANOEUVRE:

STUDY ON WOMEN'S PROGRAMMING IN AFGHANISTAN

July - September 1996



Prepared for:

UNDP Kabul
Islamabad

Consultants:

Carol A Le Duc
Homa Sabri

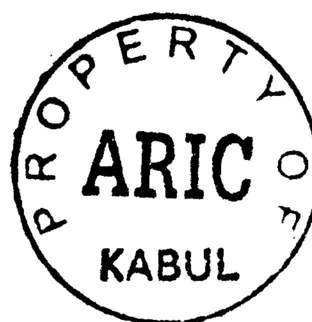
PART ONE

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

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PREFACE

The research for this study was completed mid-September 1996. Very shortly after return from the field the political scenario in Afghanistan took yet another turn; the ultra-conservative Taliban Movement gained control of Jalalabad and much of the eastern region, and went on to assume control of the capital, Kabul City.

Their entry into the capital has been a dramatic illustration of their least acceptable behaviours. Their gross violations of human rights, and particularly of female rights to education, to employment, and to security (some of which had also existed under other political authorities), have - some two years after Herat - attracted major international criticism and a call for proper recognition of human rights charters, many of which Afghanistan has agreed and ratified. As they go on to fight for the last major city, Mazar-I-Sharif, still in the hands of the northern alliance, apprehensions increase that the Afghan people who fought so bitterly to end an alien occupation which denied freedom of religion might fall victim to another occupation which equally seeks to impose its own idiosyncratic world view..

In the midst of the strong reactions to their progress, we sought to maintain a balanced view of what we had seen and learned from discussions with the many women around Afghanistan. Our overwhelming impression was already one of substantial conservatism with respect to patriarchal dominance of women. Yet we were equally struck by the many 'first awakenings' to new demands for support which included a willingness for women to be included, provided assistance projects observed the strict codes of segregated location and female only project staff.

Above all we were impressed by the women whose resilience has often been all they had to hold on to through almost two decades of struggle to try to maintain the integrity of the family and its well-being. Equality between women and men is still a concept that is so alien to many that they just roll around laughing at the notion of such a dis-ordered world. Human rights even at the basic levels of survival have never been theirs. But the lack of these is not so funny. They are very clear that these are what they want .

> *'Look at us, we live like animals, with dirt and disease here. There's no clinic, or doctor, no school. Why should we live like this? We have a right to more...'*

It was equally clear to us that the political scenario - uncertain, ever-changing, and not a government - should not dominate our thinking. The programmes and projects we had visited resulted from the choice of agencies to support the people of Afghanistan to survive and to move forward in the rehabilitation of their country. At what is probably at least one of their greatest hours of need, is not the time to suspend that support.

Our thinking has remained unchanged. Human rights - particularly those of women and girls - must be defended, and we have closely considered this in our final conclusions and recommendations. But at the same time assistance must continue to reach out to those women - and children and men - who want to move forward, and whose need is plain. It is up to us, as the aid community, to draw upon our many internal and external resources, to be flexible in the face of this complex conflict, and to demonstrate commitment to the principles we stand for.

We two persons do not claim to have the answers. What we have tried to do is to show what has been done, to set the present scene, to provide a framework to improve, and propose some broad guidelines which leave room to manoevre for aid agencies to refine and agree some next steps in a unified way. The need to identify creative ways to address the political regressions and to support the social awakenings - which are the beginning of a proceses of positive change for women - are an unprecedented challenge which we should turn into an opportunity to demonstrate in a unified way what gender equality is about.

Carol Le Duc and *Homa Sabri*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study on women's programming in Afghanistan was recommended by the Advisory Group to the United Nations on Gender Issues in Afghanistan. Our initial thanks are due to them for creating the opportunity for us to travel quite extensively and to meet so many women representing different aspects of life today in a war-torn country. In particular we would like to express our appreciation to Pamela Collett, Nancy Hatch Dupree, and Angela Kearney for spending much of their personal time in giving critical feedback on early drafts of the report. While we did not always agree on interpretations of the complexities we observed, it was always reassuring to recognise that the women of Afghanistan could arouse so much passionate concern.

We thank the United Nations Development Programme for undertaking the commissioning, funding, and coordination of the study - and for their patience over a long delay in submitting the final document. Considerable credit is due to them for their efforts following the fall of Kabul to maintain interest in the position of women in Afghanistan, to reach out to establish dialogue with authorities on women's human rights, and to mobilise a unified approach among the United Nations family. We hope our efforts contribute usefully to this.

We should also like to thank the many project staff whom we visited for sharing with us their experiences and views, and for taking the time to explain their work from which we learnt a great deal more than we are able to do justice to. Without their generous support, meeting and talking to women would have been impossible. We hope that they will be given the opportunity to read the report, in particular chapters 3 and 4 which result substantially from their generous communications.

Appreciation is also due to the agencies who kindly hosted our visits, taking on responsibility for a variety of tasks what are inevitably tiresome chores on top of existing heavy workloads. In particular they are to be thanked for supporting in very substantial ways the arrangement of workshops which often required lengthy negotiations with authorities. Among these are the United Nations Office for Project Services, the World Food Programme, the Norwegian Project Office, UNICEF, and the United Nations Development Programme,

A mention needs to be made also of the Operation Salaam flight crews for their gender sensitivity to some practical needs amid far more demanding issues and frustrations.

Not least is our enormous appreciation of the input given by the women of Afghanistan. We hope this report in some way fulfils their one request of us - that we remind the outside world that they are still there and need all the support that can be mustered.

Carol Le Duc and *Homa Sabri*

CONTENTS